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BOSTON AND NEW YORK

AN APPROACH TO WALT WHITMAN

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BY

CARLETON NOYES

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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO

EUGENE HEFFLEY

I charge you forever reject those who would
expound me, for I cannot expound myself,
I charge that there be no theory or school
founded out of me,
I charge you to leave all free, as I have left all
free.

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AN APPROACH TO WALT WHITMAN

I

THE MAN

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man.

A BIG, gray, leisurely figure, ample, unconstrained, somewhat uncouth perhaps, but nevertheless strangely engaging by virtue of a native ease of manner and his manifest sincerity, — this is the image in broad strokes that suggests itself on mention of the name of Walt Whitman. It is a figure familiar in picture and by report. The flowing, wind-tossed beard and hair, the kindly mouth, the far-seeing eyes, the free-and-easy lilt of the large-framed body, distinguish him among the crowd, and invest him with the authority of nat-

ural things. Obviously, he is not an indoor product. He is a growth of the soil, of the sun and rain and the wide winds. Rugged, untrimmed, he has the breadth and sufficiency that Nature imparts to the things that grow in harmony with her generous laws. One has heard of his odd way of life, trying his hand at a little of everything, not sticking to anything for long, a good deal of a loafer, a wanderer, and everybody's friend. He follows the open road, tracing some clue of his own, and content with the straws of experience that chance blows across his path. Among his numerous and varied exploits, he has made some fantastic-looking verses.

Walt Whitman is a name in literature, though it is in drawing-rooms and libraries that he would seem to be least at home. If he has written a book, it must be different from most. Such a personality as this must surely overflow the constraint of words and reach out beyond the printed

page. His book, as it happens, is only a cluster of grass that he has gathered along his loitering way. But these casual leaves, fresh and alive with the climbing sap, are tokens of an immense reality. They are the well-considered offering of a genuine man.

In "Leaves of Grass," Walt Whitman is revealed as a thinker of profound insight and as an authentic poet. But more persuasive than his thought, more moving than his poetry, is the man himself. He is a presence. His secret, the spell which draws and holds us, is personality. The literary character of his work is incidental. His poetry is a means, the means that Whitman chooses for communicating his experience. The experience itself, realized vividly at first hand, is the main concern. Calling us out of the library into the streets and the open air, he takes us away from art accomplished and brings us direct to things. For these are "the real poems

(what we call poems being merely pictures)." The culture that he represents is not in the books: it is the training of the sensibilities through the discipline of contact with immediate reality. He substitutes life for a tradition; his gift is vital human intercourse now and here. What we may expect to find in Whitman, as we turn his pages, is an actual friend and comrade. His poetry is finally the communication of himself. By the medium of his verse, he shares his experience with us, making us partakers of it and of its fruits through imaginative sympathy.

The avenues of approach to Whitman are many. We may take him purely as a poet, luxuriating in the sheer beauty of his phrasing in numberless inspired passages. We may regard him in a more militant aspect, as the prophet of Democracy, the self-appointed bard of "these States," and interpreter to himself of the average man. His political and economic theoriz-

ing, elaborated especially in his prose writings, though not of the orthodox schools, deserves consideration, as showing keen insight and a power of shrewd criticism. For some readers, the final significance of "Leaves of Grass" will consist in its philosophic doctrine, its treatment of the ultimate themes, — of God, of Being, of the purport of life, the mystery of death, the hope of immortality. But in general, I believe that Whitman has most for those who meet him at the outset as a man. The reading of Whitman is not merely æsthetic in its effect, an imaginative and emotional excitation, though it is that in part. Nor is it simply an intellectual exercise and a dim excursion into regions of abstraction. Whitman goes all the way round life. Our contact with him is contact with an actual human being in the flesh, and it is attended with practical consequences for our wayfaring through the world. Walt Whitman is a comrade for the journey.

Beginning my studies the first step pleas'd me so much,
The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power
of motion,
The least insect or animal, the senses, eyesight, love,
The first step I say awed me and pleas'd me so much,
I have hardly gone and hardly wish'd to go any farther,
But stop and loiter all the time to sing it in ecstatic
songs.

In these lines Whitman defines his relation to the world and to experience. He is a lounger through life, acted upon rather than acting. His attitude is one of awe and wonder; the result is ecstasy. The universe for him is a procession; and he is a delighted though quiescent looker-on. As persons, objects, events move by, the throng of the streets, the play of human energies and occupations, the acting out of "God's calm annual drama,"—

Gorgeous processions, songs of birds,
Sunrise that fullest feeds and freshens most the soul,
The heaving sea, the waves upon the shore, the musical, strong waves,
The woods, the stalwart trees, the slender, tapering
trees,

The liliput countless armies of the grass,
The heat, the showers, the measureless pasturages,
The scenery of the snows, the winds' free orchestra,
The stretching light-hung roof of clouds, the clear cerulean and the silvery fringes,
The high dilating stars, the placid beckoning stars,
The moving flocks and herds, the plains and emerald meadows,
The shows of all the varied lands and all the growths and products,—

little by little he is absorbed, taken up by them, and he becomes in himself the thing on which he looks. He identifies himself with all forms. The whole world for him is animate, instinct with feeling and big with purpose. He enters into the life of all kinds of men, he realizes in himself the conditions of every variety of human experience.

I understand the large hearts of heroes,
The courage of present times and all times,
How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steam-ship, and Death chasing it up and down the storm,
How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days and faithful of nights,

And chalk'd in large letters on a board, *Be of good cheer, we will not desert you;*
How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days and would not give it up,
How he saved the drifting company at last,
How the lank loose-gown'd women look'd when boated from the side of their prepared graves,
How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the sharp-lipp'd unshaved men;
All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,
I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.

But it is not a question of human experience only. Every natural object is alive, plays its part, and implicates ultimate meanings.

You air that serves me with breath to speak!
You objects that call from diffusion my meanings and give them shape!
You light that wraps me and all things in delicate equable showers!
You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides!
I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me.

In the manifold discrete objects of the external world Whitman finds the expression

and fulfillment of himself. He loves them with a radiant, inclusive love, for he is of them and they are of him. Caught up into a whole of ecstasy, together they embrace the cosmos.

So, absorbing and absorbed, Whitman loiters along the road. In wide fields under spacious skies, he loafs and invites his soul. Whether he is "looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway, flatting the flesh of my nose on the thick plate-glass," or "wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds, or down a lane or along the beach," each moment and whatever happens thrills him with joy. A "caresser of life," he basks in the radiations of influence exhaling from every object. Himself "effusing and fluid, a phantom curiously floating, now here absorb'd and arrested," he enters into mystical communion with the whole.

Mystical in the last analysis this attitude certainly is, but the immediate and

practical outcome of it is an immense sympathy. Identifying himself with every form of life, with every object, he comes to understand it with an understanding that transcends the mere exercise of the intellect; his contact with the world is one of feeling. It is precisely by the power of sympathy that Whitman is enabled to impress his personality upon us primarily as a man. High and far into regions of thought he will carry us and open to us cosmic vistas, if we will follow him; but his feet are planted squarely upon earth, and he is always very close to things. He makes us feel that his experience is just common human experience after all,—yours, mine, any man's.

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,
The dark threw its patches down upon me also.

. . . . . .

Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,
I am he who knew what it was to be evil,
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,

. . . . . .

Was one with the rest, the days and haps of the rest,

. . . . . .

Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping,
Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,
The same old rôle, the rôle that is what we make it, as great as we like,
Or as small as we like, or both great and small.

Universal in the range of his sympathy, like some messiah Whitman takes up into himself the widest and deepest life of all men. He rejoices in their joy, he suffers in their sufferings. He knows. The assurance of such understanding of one's own experience and needs, of companionship where others perhaps have failed to penetrate the isolation of one's separate life, this is the appeal that sounds from out his pages to press more intimately into a knowledge of this strange, great-hearted, answering man.

In the total achievement of Walt Whitman, all elements converge to the power

of attraction by sheer force of personality. Endowed by birth with a great and ample nature, with a universally responsive temperament and with all-inclusive sympathies, Whitman devoted his entire life to the development of his gifts and the fruition of himself. Himself was his career, — but wholly consecrated always to the service of mankind. As an agent in that development, contributing to and fulfilling that fruition, his literary work is saturated with personality, and it takes its significance in the measure that it is the expression, not of what he knew or what he thought, but of what he felt and was. Toward the accomplishment of fullest and freest expression, his poetry is stripped of all adornments. It is as a runner in a race. His verse is muscle and sinew, clean, naked, throbbing with red blood, open to the sun and winds. It is not here a question of art for art's sake, the graces of phrase and refinements of style. Without surplusage it

presses to its goal. The goal, — communication of personality; the means to it, — expression at any cost: a medium peculiarly adapted to its end and fulfilling it with success; the end, — utterance of a love that is at once individual and cosmic; — here is the secret of Whitman's sympathy and power.

To start with, therefore, Whitman was a bigger man than most. And then his poetry is so shaped as to give that central bigness its completest and most direct expression. So it is that the work of Whitman is surcharged with personality. In this exposition of personality — considered for the moment apart from the special message that it carries — lies the primary and essential distinctiveness of this poetry. But, it may be asked, why distinctiveness? Wherein, in this respect, does Whitman's work differ from the poetry, the art, of other men? All art is in a degree the utterance of personality, the bodying forth

in concrete expressive symbols of what the artist has thought and felt. Yes, *in a degree.* The work of every artist, whatever his subject and his medium, expresses something of himself. Whether he paints a portrait or a landscape, whether he composes a song or a symphony, whether he writes a poem, a novel, or a play, something of his own life and experience inevitably goes into his work. In general, however, the artist himself is only implied in his art and not fully expressed. We must pass beyond the work, the subject and the medium, and we must divine the man.

The work of Whitman exhibits this difference from other art and achieves its primary distinction thus, that by deliberate and conscious intention, it is wholly, undisguisedly, relentlessly, the exposition, indeed the exploitation, of personality. Of him it is not to be said that he expresses himself by means of his subject. He himself *is* the subject. The title of his earliest

and longest poem applies with equal force to the entire volume of his work. It is the "Song of Myself." His purpose was, as he has defined it retrospectively in a postscript to "Leaves of Grass," "to articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and æsthetic Personality, in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America —and to exploit that Personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book." Thus "Leaves of Grass" is the complete explication, detailed and multitudinous, of the personality of Whitman, a single individual, living a certain definite kind of life in America in the middle and later years of the nineteenth century. But at the same time that the book is individual in its details, it is universal in its application. Though Whitman

interprets the world in terms of his own experience, we must not overlook his typical and representative character. We miss the meaning of his work if we fail to see that

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them, —

this Whitman, gathering into himself every person, character, experience, is but speaking for all men or any man.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

It is, then, as the representative of you and me that Whitman, actually or imaginatively, sounds the depths of every emotion, penetrates the recesses of men's motives, feelings, and acts, sends out his being into all life, and absorbs the cosmos into himself. In his person we have an embodi-

ment of our separate individual experience; and to that extent his poetry becomes for us our own expression.

Such is, in general terms, the figure of Walt Whitman in literature, — his total attitude and special point of view. What he stands for in poetry, what we may expect to find in him as we approach his work, is a compelling attractive personal force. We meet him on the ground of a common humanity. The essence of his personality is distilled for us in his poetry, and therein we have the man in his fullest revelation. But what he was is expressed also in the external events of his life; and these in turn recoiled upon him to mould and modify the receptive, always plastic, disposition that was his by birth. A wider understanding of the man and his work, therefore, may be won by a rapid survey of his actual adventures in the world of men and things.

The story, indeed, can be told briefly, for with the exception of one divinely heroic, devoted service, extending through a period of three years, a service titanic in its effort and incalculably beneficent in its results, the external incidents of Whitman's life are commonplace enough in the recital. Their significance lies in his reaction on them and in what he was able to wrest from them of spiritual experience. The very commonplaceness of it all lends it an added meaning, for his mission precisely was to endow "common lives" with the "glows and glories and final illustriousness which belong to every real thing, and to real things only." Average life is his theme, —ordinary men and women, cities, fields, the sky, morning, noon, and sunset, night and the stars, things "eligible" to all. These are his theme, yet these not in themselves, but as interpreted by personality. For these things, as he says, "involve not only their own inherent quality, but the

quality, just as inherent and important, of their *point of view*." The circumstances of Whitman's life are momentous as they illustrate his point of view; and in them, as we run them over, we may try to see the expression of the man.

In the prose volume, "Specimen Days and Collect," Whitman has recorded a number of interesting autobiographical details. We learn that he was sprung from old-world stock, long resident in America, — Dutch on his mother's side, with an admixture of Quaker, and on his father's side, English Puritan. Hardihood, vigor, and courage both bodily and mental, a largeness of nature which comes with life out of doors, tenacity, receptiveness, simplicity, love of plainness, — plain living, plain people, — a thoroughgoing democracy of attitude and conduct, personal cleanliness, grasp of detail, uncompromising sincerity, profound religiousness with little regard for external forms, high spirituality and

idealism, — these were the boy's inheritance from forbears immediate and divergingly remote. Walt (named Walter after his father), the second of nine children, was born May 31, 1819, — the same year with John Ruskin and James Russell Lowell, — at West Hills, near Huntington, on the northern shore of Long Island. His father was a farmer, and a carpenter and builder. When the boy was four years old, the family removed to Brooklyn, at that time a "village" of ten to twelve thousand inhabitants, and with its trees, parks, and open spaces, more like the country than a city. Here he attended the common schools until the age of thirteen, learning the "three R's" and a little grammar and geography. Following this meagre schooling, he found a place in a lawyer's office as errand-boy. His employer helped him with his handwriting and composition, and subscribed for him to a big circulating library. Now he "revel'd in romance-read-

ing of all kinds; first, the 'Arabian Nights,' all the volumes, an amazing treat. Then, with sorties in very many other directions, took in Walter Scott's novels, one after another, and his poetry." After about two years he went to work in a weekly newspaper and printing office, to learn the trade.

"I develop'd (1833–4–5)," he says, "into a healthy, strong youth (grew too fast, though, was nearly as big as a man at 15 or 16.) . . . At 16, 17, and so on, was fond of debating societies, and had an active membership with them. . . . A most omnivorous novel-reader, these and later years, devour'd everything I could get. Fond of the theatre, also, in New York, went whenever I could — sometimes witnessing fine performances. 1836–7, work'd as compositor in printing offices in New York city. Then, when little more than 18, and for a while afterwards, went to teaching country schools down in Queens and Suffolk counties, Long Island, and 'boarded round.' (This latter I consider one of my best experiences and deepest lessons in human nature behind the scenes

and in the masses.) In '39, '40, I started and publish'd a weekly paper in my native town, Huntington. Then returning to New York city and Brooklyn, work'd on as printer and writer, mostly prose, but an occasional shy at 'poetry.' . . . The years 1846, '47, and there along, see me still in New York city, working as writer and printer, having my usual good health, and a good time generally. . . . In 1848, '49, I was occupied as editor of the 'Daily Eagle' newspaper, in Brooklyn. The latter year went off on a leisurely journey and working expedition (my brother Jeff with me) through all the middle States, and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Lived awhile in New Orleans, and work'd there on the editorial staff of 'Daily Crescent' newspaper. After a time plodded back northward, up the Mississippi, and around to, and by the way of the great lakes, Michigan, Huron, and Erie, to Niagara Falls and Lower Canada, finally returning through central New York and down the Hudson; traveling altogether probably 8000 miles this trip, to and fro. '51, '53, occupied in house-building in Brooklyn."

This occupation he gave up, as he found he was beginning to make money, and he wanted to remain free. In 1855, to continue Whitman's own narrative, —

"commenced putting 'Leaves of Grass' to press for good, at the job printing office of my friends, the brothers Rome, in Brooklyn, after many MS. doings and undoings — (I had great trouble in leaving out the stock 'poetical' touches, but succeeded at last)."

Of the first edition of "Leaves of Grass" Emerson said in a letter to Whitman, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start." In the bare recital of the external facts of Whitman's early life, this foreground remains still unexplained. For the real significance of these years of boyhood, youth, and early maturity lies in the influences of out-of-doors and the contact with elemental forces in Nature and in men.

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

There, and not in outward incidents and acts, is the real record of those years. To the casual onlooker, Whitman was an indifferent workman; a loafer many thought him. He did not continue long at any one job, and he worked at that intermittently, and only when and as he pleased. He allowed himself many days off, sometimes weeks at a stretch. But the days were not wasted or unemployed. Results were not evident at once in terms of a day's wages. If the idle weeks made the judicious grieve, they counted finally as the judicious were not able to guess. He spent much time on Long Island in the open, roaming the woods and fields, or holding intimate, mystic communion with the sea. It is difficult to define in words the quality of this ex-

perience. It must be felt; and Whitman makes us feel it in his poetry. It is an essence and an effluence. Words are an affair of the intellect; whereas Whitman's relation to things was less intellectual than spiritual and actually physical. He absorbed with his body. He loved to lie naked in the wind and sun; or after bathing in the sea, he raced up and down the beach in Adamic simplicity and freshness, "declaiming Homer or Shakspere to the surf and sea-gulls by the hour." The essence of these sights, these contacts, billowing, multiform, and rhythmic as the grass, is distilled for us in Whitman's pages, through the magic of his "divine power to speak words," exhaling from them like an aroma and tactile sensation. A single incident of his boyhood, as he has recounted it in his verse, may suggest his attitude toward experience, and may serve to typify results, as he "absorbed and translated."

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child leaving his bed wander'd alone, bare-headed, barefoot,
Down from the shower'd halo,
Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were alive,
Out from the patches of briers and blackberries,
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings and fallings I heard,
From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if with tears,
From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the mist,
From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,
From the myriad thence-arous'd words,
From the word stronger and more delicious than any,
From such as now they start the scene revisiting,
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,
Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,
Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,
A reminiscence sing.

Profoundly and intimately as Whitman was penetrated by the inner meanings of nature, yet the streets and myriad-teeming life of cities were no less significant and fruitful. Always self-possessed and at ease in his big fashion in the presence of any man, he especially liked "powerful, uneducated persons," and he went freely among them; he hobnobbed with them, made them his friends and cronies. Almost daily, while living in Brooklyn and New York, after his return from the South, he crossed on the Fulton Ferry,

"often up in the pilot-houses where I could get a full sweep, absorbing shows, accompaniments, surroundings. What oceanic currents, eddies, underneath — the great tides of humanity also, with ever-shifting movements. Indeed, I have always had a passion for ferries; to me they afford inimitable, streaming, never-failing, living poems." "Besides Fulton Ferry," he continues, "off and on for years, I knew and frequented Broadway — that noted avenue of New York's

crowded and mixed humanity, and of so many notables. . . . Always something novel or inspiriting; yet mostly to me the hurrying and vast amplitude of those never-ending human currents."

One phase of these days, Whitman says, must by no means go unrecorded, — namely the Broadway omnibuses and the

"men specially identified with them, and giving vitality and meaning to them — the drivers — a strange, natural, quick-eyed and wondrous race. . . . How many hours, forenoons and afternoons — how many exhilarating night-times I have had — perhaps June or July, in cooler air — riding the whole length of Broadway, listening to some yarn, (and the most vivid yarns ever spun, and the rarest mimicry) — or perhaps I declaiming some stormy passage from 'Julius Cæsar' or 'Richard,' (you could roar as loudly as you chose in that heavy, dense, uninterrupted street-bass). Yes, I knew all the drivers then, Broadway Jack, Dressmaker, Balky Bill, George Storms, Old Elephant, his brother Young Elephant, (who came afterward,) Tippy, Pop Rice,

Big Frank, Yellow Joe, Pete Callahan, Patsey Dee, and dozens more; for there were hundreds."

In this loving, reminiscent recital of the quaint nicknames, there is a flavor of that curious intimacy of understanding that Whitman had, which illustrates, better than any possible definition, his extraordinary personal magnetism. It is evident that he liked these rough, natural men, and knew them through and through; and in return they liked him, because he was a real man, no "yellow streak" in him, and they understood him. This was Whitman's way with everybody. He continues: —

"Not only for comradeship, and sometimes affection — great studies I found them also. (I suppose the critics will laugh heartily, but the influence of those Broadway omnibus jaunts and drivers and declamations and escapades undoubtedly enter'd into the gestation of 'Leaves of Grass.')"

So, Whitman was being educated as a

poet! It took him longer than most men to find himself; and in his capacity for single-minded, unmitigated enjoyment, there was always something of the boy about him. Everything that came his way counted, and was turned to his own uses. People saw him lounging through life, large and free in his movements, and careless of time. Perhaps they smiled indulgently, for his abundant ease and good-nature were contagious; possibly some condemned him. But there were processes at work which people did not observe. He went his own way and took his time. For he saw what they did not see, — the mystery and true meaning of life. And he knew what they did not know, — how certain is the future.

Whitman's artistic training was won in the same haphazard, inconsequent, and receptive fashion. It came to him not as a discipline but as enjoyment. In these early years he read much, but always where his whim and liking showed the way. Books

for him were not mere literature: they were like men, or scenes in Nature. His habit was to read in the presence of outdoor influences. He went over thoroughly the Old and New Testaments, and

"absorb'd (probably to better advantage for me than in any library or indoor room — it makes such difference *where* you read) Shakspere, Ossian, the best translated versions I could get of Homer, Eschylus, Sophocles, the old German Nibelungen, the ancient Hindoo poems, and one or two other masterpieces, Dante's among them." The Iliad, in a prose version, he read first thoroughly "in a shelter'd hollow of rocks and sand, with the sea on each side." And he adds, "I have wonder'd since why I was not overwhelm'd by those mighty masters. Likely because I read them, as described, in the full presence of Nature, under the sun, with the far-spreading landscape and vistas, or the sea rolling in."

So, also, Whitman's own poetry is read to its best effect not in a library but out

of doors, in the same spirit in which he declaimed his "Leaves" to himself in the open air, and "tried them by trees, stars, rivers."

Even in the matter of books, then, Whitman was at heart a primal man, true child of Nature, loving life. But for a time in Brooklyn and New York, as part of his many-sided development, he figured as a literary personage. He was associated now and again with various newspapers. He wrote stories and verse which found acceptance and a place in leading magazines. He was the author of a "temperance novel." He trained himself to be a public speaker, came forward in debates and political meetings, and drew up outlines for talks on history, philosophy, and art. He wrote what his mother called "barrels of lectures." Whitman's writing at this time, both prose and verse, shows a certain vigor of mind and reveals an interest in public affairs, a strong democratic spirit, and sympathy with the

common people; but his style is "literary" and conventional, without individual distinction. In it all, there is little hint of what was to come.

Perhaps the most potent influence on Whitman's purely æsthetic development was his unflagging attendance at the theatre and the opera. As a boy and young man he saw "(reading them carefully the day beforehand) quite all Shakspere's acting dramas, played wonderfully well." He says, characteristically, that he always scanned an audience as rigidly as the play, and he speaks of "the whole crowded auditorium, and what seeth'd in it, and flush'd from its faces and eyes, to me as much a part of the show as any." Whitman was not himself a musician, but he had a deep love and genuinely intelligent appreciation of music. In poetry, he cared for the big things, the elemental, greatest world-poems. Painting seemed to interest him but little, for in his writings there are slight refer-

ences to pictures, although he speaks with enthusiasm of several hours spent with a collection of Millet's paintings and drawings. Of all the arts, music made the most direct æsthetic appeal and reached him most intimately. In his own work, poems like "The Mystic Trumpeter," "That Music Always Round Me," and "Proud Music of the Storm," and many shorter passages in the "Leaves" are vibrant with a deep and exquisite musical feeling.

The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies,
It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them.

During the years in New York, Whitman had abundant opportunity to hear good music. "I heard," he says, "these years, well render'd, all the Italian and other operas in vogue." And he remarks elsewhere, "The experts and musicians of my present friends claim that the new Wagner and his pieces belong far more truly to me, and I to them. Very likely. But I was

fed and bred under the Italian dispensation, and absorb'd it, and doubtless show it."

The years up to 1850 were a time of preparation, indeterminate and more or less unconscious, it would seem, on Whitman's part. Then came a change. A sudden illumination flooded the dark gropings after something, and there was revealed to him the single meaning of the complex years. Capacities were there, latent, partly exercised, half-developed, but as yet to no end. Now all things flowed together, took shape, and became a Purpose. The bud, which had been slowly forming, burst into instant flower. The moment was sharp and definite in time. The result was cosmic in its scope and influence. As he lay, one "transparent summer morning," a new consciousness was born in him: it was the sudden, vivid, direct realization of God and of his own soul.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love.

This sense of the unity of the Whole, the oneness of all creation with its creator, of love as the vitalizing, all-fusing energy that throbs in every atom of the universe, is the germinal motive and life-essence of "Leaves of Grass."

From this time on, Whitman set himself deliberately to the making of his poems.

"After continued personal ambition and effort, as a young fellow, to enter with the rest into competition for the usual rewards, business, political, literary, etc. . . . I found myself remaining possess'd, at the age of thirty-one to thirty-three, with a special desire and convic-

tion. Or rather, to be quite exact, a desire that had been flitting through my previous life, or hovering on the flanks, mostly indefinite hitherto, had steadily advanced to the front, defined itself, and finally dominated everything else."

This desire was to set forth his entire personality against the background of "its immediate days and of current America," in a form and in terms new in literature. At the time when this desire was becoming articulate, Whitman was employed as a carpenter. His outward life, as it appeared to others, is thus described by his brother George.

"I was in Brooklyn in the early fifties, when Walt came back from New Orleans. We all lived together. No change seemed to come over him; he was the same man he had been, grown older and wiser. He made a living now — wrote a little, worked a little, loafed a little. . . . We did not know what he was writing. He did not seem more abstracted than usual. He would lie abed late, and after getting up would write a

few hours if he took the notion — perhaps would go off the rest of the day. We were all at work — all except Walt. But we knew he was printing the book."

In view of Whitman's out-of-door ways, his absorption in Nature and his passion for streets and actual human contacts, it is easy to divine the processes of gestation of his poems. Lines were jotted down as they came to him, anywhere, on ferries and omnibuses, at his work, or in the theatre. Then they were tested and tried by the sound of the wind or in sight of the sea. In 1855 he began the printing of his book, setting much of the type with his own hands; and in that year, the volume, containing twelve poems, appeared under the title "Leaves of Grass."

A thousand copies were printed. The book was placed on sale at several bookstores in New York and Brooklyn. Few, if any, copies were sold. In spite of this discouragement, and in the face of a storm

of frenzied condemnation, protest, and abuse from reviewers and literary men, Whitman brought out the following year a second edition, containing twenty poems in addition to the original twelve. A third edition, adding one hundred and twenty-two new poems to the preceding thirty-two, was published in Boston in 1860.

Against the date, 1860, Whitman writes, in "Specimen Days": —

"To sum up the foregoing from the outset, (and, of course, far, far more unrecorded,) I estimate three leading sources and formative stamps to my own character, now solidified for good or bad, and its subsequent literary and other outgrowth — the maternal nativity-stock brought hither from far-away Netherlands, for one, (doubtless the best) — the subterranean tenacity and central bony structure (obstinacy, wilfulness) which I get from my paternal English elements, for another — and the combination of my Long Island birth-spot, sea-shores, childhood's scenes, absorptions, with teeming

Brooklyn and New York — with, I suppose, my experiences afterward in the secession outbreak, for the third. For, in 1862, startled by news that my brother George, an officer in the 51st New York volunteers, had been seriously wounded, (first Fredericksburg battle, December 13th,) I hurriedly went down to the field of war in Virginia."

The story of the next three years is difficult to tell. The quality of Whitman's service in the war-hospitals in Washington is so immediate, so personal and intimate, that it cannot at this day be adequately phrased. The story must be read as Whitman himself has told it, so beautifully and movingly, yet with such simple, unconscious modesty, with extraordinary justice of word and reticence of sentiment, in the section of "Leaves of Grass" entitled "Drum Taps," in pages of "Specimen Days," and in the volume of letters named "The Wound Dresser." In the field and at Washington, for three years

Whitman ministered to sick and wounded soldiers, — boys and very young men, most of them, from fifteen to twenty-five, — as a self-appointed messenger of relief. So he rendered countless and unspeakable services: distributing little gifts, some fruit, jellies, tobacco, writing-paper, and envelopes already stamped, reading-matter, small sums of money; writing letters for the soldiers to the "folks at home"; reading aloud; humoring as far as possible every little whim; and above all, beyond any other gift, giving love and personal affection to lonely, homesick, wounded boys and unfriended dying men. "I can testify," he says, "that friendship has literally cured a fever, and the medicine of daily affection, a bad wound." The money needed to carry on his work was contributed by friends in the North. His own private expenses he was able to meet by writing for the newspapers. He lived with extreme frugality, but he took care always

to appear in the hospitals in health-giving freshness and cleanliness of body and dress. Thus he went among from eighty thousand to one hundred thousand of the sick and wounded, as "sustainer of spirit and body in some slight degree, in time of need."

Without his experience of the War, Whitman has said, "Leaves of Grass" could not have been what it now is. His approach in closest intimacy to young men of all the States, North, West, and South, gave him, as nothing else could have given him, an understanding of the possibilities and the grandeur of this country, and its promise, in the human stuff of which it is composed, for the future of democracy. In the midst of agonies and death, the love of comrades which he had known through the years, and had celebrated in his poetry, came to its fullest sublime expression. In the awful wrench and compelling realities of such contacts, the last bonds of conventional restraints and superficial reserves

were snapped asunder, and love flowed forth, enveloping all things in life-bringing floods. In the presence of death he divined death's meaning. He learned anew the power of faith, and the redeeming strength of hope in immortality. He saw how out of sacrifice and pain, joy is born, and evil is transfigured into good. These years of suffering and opportunity, as they were for him the supreme expression of comradeship, so they were the summit of his achievement in his relations to his fellows, and they were the fruition-time of his genius. From this time on, his face is turned toward the Valley of the Shadow, which opens into the Light beyond.

Toward the end of the War, Whitman's supremely perfect health, in which he had gloried, gave way to the superhuman drain upon it. His amazing vitality was weakened; and at last, while helping one day to dress a gangrenous wound in the hospital, he contracted blood-poisoning. From

this attack he recovered, but his health was broken, never to be fully restored. About this time, Whitman obtained a clerkship in the Department of the Interior. Shortly afterward, he was removed by the Secretary of the Department, in circumstances little creditable to that official, for having published an immoral book. Almost immediately, however, he secured a clerkship in the Attorney-General's office. This position he retained until 1873, when he was incapacitated by a stroke of paralysis. He removed to Camden, New Jersey, which he made his home during the remainder of his life. These years he gave to literary work, undisturbed by any important outward events, composing poems, writing prose, and bringing out successive editions of his works. He was able to spend much time out of doors, basking in the light, listening to Nature, and absorbing cosmic influences. His occupations and observations are recorded with great charm in

"Specimen Days." In 1879 he made a journey as far west as the Rocky Mountains, and home by way of Canada. In Camden he gathered about him a little company of devoted friends. Ill and poor, and still the object of bitter attack and threatened legal prosecution, he was nevertheless cheered by the recognition his work was receiving in England and on the Continent. There was more suffering than gladness for him now, but his serenity remained unshaken. His whole life justified his poetry, and never more than in the closing years. He kept the faith to the end. At last the hour of quiet was vouchsafed, March 26, 1892, and Walt Whitman was born again.

Joy, shipmate, joy!
(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)
Our life is closed, our life begins,
The long, long anchorage we leave,
The ship is clear at last, she leaps!
She swiftly courses from the shore,
Joy, shipmate, joy.

II

WHITMAN'S ART

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature,
He or she is greatest who contributes the greatest original practical example.

A READER of poetry, trained in literary perception, seeking æsthetic experience, and finding satisfaction in the rhythmic outlines of beautiful forms and in the music of measure and rhyme, opens "Leaves of Grass" to encounter a shock. At first glance he is bewildered and perhaps repelled. These rough, common, everyday words, these bumps and knots, these ejaculations, these strange, involved sentences or no-sentences, — this is not prose exactly, nor

does it seem to be poetry, as he is familiar with it. His eye falls on the line, "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." Not only is the poetry uncouth: this shaggy bard appears to be aware of his uncouthness and even to glory in it. Yet, perhaps, piqued by curiosity, the reader ventures a page or two, with open mind and attentive ear. Unaccountably, as it seems at first, the spell begins to lay hold upon him. Through these paragraphs undulates a subtle rhythm, like the rhythm of cosmic forces,—the ebb and flow of the tide, the return of the seasons. These random phrases —are they not accidental?—fall with the eternal rightness of the fall of a stone; they strike with the emphasis and sudden finality of a lightning-bolt. The power of it is undeniable. In spite of himself, the reader surrenders to the magic of this new strange utterance; and he asks himself wonderingly, What is poetry, after all?

In terms of a broad definition, poetry is

the articulate expression of emotion through the medium of concrete symbols phrased in words; it is impassioned speech. The *form*, by which poetry is distinguished from prose, is not a primary differentia, but follows as a consequence upon the emotion within, which pulses outward to expression.

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin — I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Here there is neither rhyme nor definite metre. The emotion is intense and the thought exalted; bound up together, they embody themselves in a form, and they speak a language, which have the power to stir the reader and to rouse in him a mood consonant with the writer's own. Or again,

out of the mystery of the night and quickened by the touch of earth, the soul cries,—

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.
Press close, bare-bosom'd night — press close, magnetic nourishing night!
Night of south winds — night of the large few stars!
Still nodding night — mad naked summer night.

Smile, O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset — earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth — rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.

Poetry in the great sense this work surely is. Those who are repelled by its form have not penetrated beneath the surface. For the distinction between prose and poetry is a matter less of external form than of content.

The degree in which literature becomes poetry is measured by the intensity of emotion it embodies and communicates, or by the exaltation of the thought expressed, or by the union of the two elements. In true poetry, the external form is a result. For intense emotion and exalted thought utter themselves naturally, inevitably, in rhythmic forms. Rhyme, which figures so largely in modern verse, came late into poetry, and then less as an essential part of the form than as an added ornament. Rhyme supplies to verse the character of melody, and by the addition of this musical quality heightens its immediately sensuous appeal. So rhyme may be called an accompaniment of poetry; the foundation of the form is rhythm.

As poetry differs in its nature both as to matter and as to manner, so it works a various effect. It may please by virtue of its form: the logic of its total structure, architectural, sculpturesque, or gemlike, satisfies the mind; its musical qualities of

metre and rhyme and tone-color delight the ear; the beauty of suggested images fills the eye. The core of thought is beaten thin, to be drawn and wrought into a surface-pattern. In contrast to this sound-weaving and verbal jeweler's-work is the poetry of energy, which compels the form to its own uses, breaking through the confines of rhyme, coercing metre to change step at need, and surcharging its medium with the throbs of flexible, variant rhythm. It debouches, as it rises,—in intensity and exaltation. Emotion and thought dominate form. Its note is power; the result—not pleasure merely, but heightened activity of being and a larger grasp on life.

In the case of Whitman, it is not important finally to determine whether his work is prose or poetry. Clearly the character of it is energy rather than formal charm. As it happens, subtleties of verbal distinctions are swept aside by his torrential utterance. Established forms, accepted

canons, suffer shipwreck; there is some loss and some beneficial purgation. Of the residuum emerging from the vortex it remains for us to consider the value. It appears in the result that our concern with Whitman's work is not classification but his power to move us. After all, the vital worth of any art-product is not conformity but energy. In approaching "Leaves of Grass," we may not content ourselves with excerpts and single passages; we are to seek to understand the nature of the work as a whole. We may be helped toward that understanding by some insight into Whitman's intentions regarding it, his hopes for it. Ultimately, however, the work is justified by its results. These may be defined by each reader for himself as they bear on his individual temper and experience. My purpose here is simply to point the way.

"Leaves of Grass" is what Whitman hoped to make it and believed it to be, —

a new thing in literature. It is a fresh start. Motive and content, vocabulary and verse-form are without precedent in English letters. Whereas the older poetry depends for its appeal upon stirring action or dramatic situation, or is the expression of some phase of temperament in an exceptional man, Whitman in contrast aims to set forth an entire personality, not exceptional but possible to any man, acting in an environment, definite as to time and place, which offers only the incitements and occasions of average daily life. His motive is new, in that the personality he records is taken in its entirety, in the small equally with the large. His method of attack is different, in that he divests himself of all the trappings of exalted station, unusual endowment, or erudite achievement. With ample gait and free assuredness of bearing, he moves into the page in the easy dress of a man of the people who earns his living by his hands. The stronghold of aristocracy in literature

is stormed by an artisan of the streets and country-side, who makes himself at home upon the ruins and calmly builds himself a shelter there. Consequent upon this shift in emphasis, his manner of address is necessarily different, in that it is the speech and terminology of common men and things. A workman could exchange his comfortable natural blouse for the rigid coat of evening wear more gracefully than such a purpose could clothe itself in the court costume of polite letters. New motive, new material, new form, — this is the task that Whitman deliberately set himself to achieve in poetry.

Original and unique as the book is, it is not to be supposed that "Leaves of Grass" is an accident, or that Whitman cut loose from the past altogether. His first word to his new public — the opening sentence of the Preface of the first edition of his poems — reads: "America does not repel the past or what it has produced under its

forms." A period of seven or eight years was the time of gestation of the book, following upon a long apprenticeship to the established craft of letters. His literary training, desultory as it was and quite at his own will and pleasure, reverted to sources and models of supreme excellence. He recognized the service of older literatures to their age and people, and he freely admitted his own obligation to them. "If I had not stood," he says, "before those poems with uncover'd head, fully aware of their colossal grandeur and beauty of form and spirit, I could not have written 'Leaves of Grass.'" But though the "temper and inculcation of the old works" helped to shape him, their chief profit to him was to furnish a basis of comparison and contrast with reference to his own purpose and environment, and to supply less a model for emulation than a point of departure into the new. As America is a child and heir of the past, but independent now in its

own right, and a new being, so Whitman's poetry is made possible by elder achievement, an outgrowth from it by transmission, but it is none the less in its own time self-begotten and self-sustained. The old world had the poems of "myths, fictions, feudalism, conquest, caste, dynastic wars, and splendid exceptional characters and affairs"; the new world needs the poems of "realities and science and of the democratic average and basic equality."

Another land and time, another art. "Grateful and reverent legatee of the past," the poet of America to-day is the native-born child of the new world. Acknowledging its debt to precedent songs, "Leaves of Grass" presupposes something different. The protagonist advances to the centre of the stage, a new figure. The scene too is changed, and with it, all its accessories. It is no longer a question of myth, legend, or romance, or "choice plots of love or war"; of heroes, great personages, or fine-drawn sensibilities.

The theme of the new song is your average man, going practically about his work, enjoying honestly his hours off, and always in direct actual contact with things. The theatre of his deeds is the workshop or the fields; his glory and illustriousness is to be himself; his recompense is to know reality. As Whitman surveys the occupations and opportunities of America, set off against the constricted environment of old-world poets, it seems to him "as if a poetry with cosmic and dynamic features of magnitude and limitlessness suitable to the human soul, were never possible before." This poetry can draw its inspiration and supply all its needed symbols from the lives of common men.

Common life, if it is to find voice at all, must come to expression in its own terms. Fitly to celebrate the average man, we must speak his racy idiom; to glorify things still in the making, we need the vernacular,—language that is still fluid and plastic in the

mouths of men. There shall be no rigid forms, no polished reflecting surfaces; all shall be rough and fresh and smelling of the earth,—the fragrance of new-cut timber, the acrid tang of unset mortar; it must have movement to tally the rush and hubbub of the streets. With aggressive deliberateness and a fierce joy, Whitman denies himself all "stock ornaments." He will not give us a "mere tale, a rhyme, a prettiness"; he will make a poem of materials and show how they furnish their parts toward the soul. The true art, said Millet, with whom Whitman had so much in common, is "to make the trivial serve for the expression of the sublime." Often with Whitman the trivial refused to unfold into the sublime, and became ridiculous. But no less often his performance exceeded himself, and his flight outstripped his aim.

With this preliminary clearing of the ground, Whitman moved to the attack. He approached his work, equipped with a pro-

gramme and armed with a theory. He proposed to himself a definite task, and he had clearly conceived notions as to how he should accomplish it. His sense of the importance of his project, and the conscious elaborateness with which he set himself to the assault, worked for both good and ill. Had he been less ambitious in his aim, he could not have carried so far; but his very comprehensiveness involved him in the tangle of the absurdly obvious and plunged him into the morasses of the obviously absurd. Had he been less conscious of his method, he could not have achieved his fresh sight of things, with his consequent grasp of the actual and his transcendent vision of latent spiritual meanings. But he would not have attempted the impossible, and accepting the impartial verdict which derives from reference to external standards, he would have been spared defeat where he believed himself to have compelled success.

Whitman's programme included nothing less than the universe. The macrocosm is enfolded in the microcosm. The universe renders itself intelligible in terms of man. "In the centre of all, and object of all, stands the Human Being." To be most comprehensive in his scope, he will make the poem of personality; and the human being he knows most about is of course himself. He will have life at first hand. He will not accept old-world traditions, "imported in some ship," nor "poems distill'd from poems." Although there are emotions common to all mankind, yet these, in order to make their most intimate appeal to the individual, must find expression freshly in the man's own native idiom; for the spirit and the form are one, says Whitman, and "depend far more on association, identity, and place than is supposed." So this personality which he employs as his symbol is to be set in the midst of and is to tally "the momentous spirit and facts of its imme-

diate days and of current America." Walt Whitman, in his own person and vicariously for all men, is the centre and the theme. Upon this centre converge all events, all consequences and effects, all currents and influences; from it radiate in ever-widening circles, dipping beyond the verge of human horizons and merging into infinity, all acts, all thoughts, all feelings, the very essences of all things.

Nor did Whitman undertake his programme lightly. He had his deliberate theory as to the poetic office, and clear ideas as to practical method. The poet, according to Whitman, differs from ordinary men not in kind but in degree. "The others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not." The poet is the Answerer. He resolves all idioms and tongues into his own; as he translates all things into himself, so by and through him any man may translate the universe into terms of his own personality.

It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the
tongue of you,
Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen'd.

In the poet and the poet's experience, each man finds the expression of himself and of his own experience. The ordinary man deals with parts; the poet presents the Whole. He is compounded of particulars, but he transcends particulars and becomes universal. He seeks to "aggregate all in a living principle." This principle is the unity that underlies variety, and it is the message of materials to the spirit.

A poet in this sense Whitman aims to be, and the poet of America in the last half of the nineteenth century. Now America "demands a poetry that is bold, modern, and all-surrounding and kosmical as she is herself." It must, though courteously, cut loose from even the greatest models of the past, and it must have entire faith in itself. It will inspire itself with science, with all present-day thought and

freedom, and it must bend its vision toward the future. Tried by his own direct contact with realities, the accepted poetry of his time seemed to Whitman to be hopelessly inadequate. Either its significance has passed with the passing of the transient manners and ways of thought which it depicted and expressed, as was the case with the earlier literature and later imitations of it; or it failed utterly to discern and to cope with the larger realities which Whitman knew. In his mind, the breakdown of poetry in substance is associated with the characteristics of its form. Therefore he fears "grace, elegance, civilization, delicatesse, the mellow-sweet, the sucking of honey-juice." In opposition he will assert the rugged and the rude; he will speak a language "fann'd by the breath of Nature, which leaps overhead, cares mostly for impetus and effects."

A primordial task, therefore, Whitman proposes, truly a work of creation, as he

launches himself upon the new world. He will be the inaugurator of a new-founded literature, not "to exhibit technical, rhythmic, or grammatical dexterity," but a literature "underlying life, religion, consistent with science, handling the elements and forces with competent power, teaching and training men." In any craft, he says, "he is greatest forever and ever who contributes the greatest original practical example." After our excursion into programme and theory, the practical example now engages us as we turn to estimate results.

Considered first of all in its merely formal aspect, "Leaves of Grass," whatever else it may be besides, is not to be wholly excluded from the category of poetry. Denying himself the aid of sharply marked metre and the sonority and graces of rhyme, Whitman bases his title to the poetic office upon two characteristics of his style: these are the imaginative power of

his phrasing and his rhythm. As a propagandist and a theorist, Whitman is interesting and significant, but not convincing or creative of beauty; as with Wordsworth, when he is most conscious and affirmative, he is least a poet. But by native temperament and by chance experience of life, he maintained that original and fresh relation to things which is the making of an artist; and he was gifted with an instinctive, curiously just perception of musical values which enabled him to achieve impassioned and quickening emotional expression.

Whitman has the authentic artist's innocence of the eye. He sees all things as though for the first time, and he sees them with delighted surprise. This deliberate freshness of vision, attended by wonder, makes possible a grasp of the salient and the essential. From this follows the graving epithet, cutting the image with lightning-revealed distinctness; from this, the evocative phrase, summoning forth the

very being of the thing,—a living spirit now, transcending its material embodiment, playing upon our spirit and quickening us to response and fusion. Whitman ranges all the way from the literal mention of hopelessly prosaic objects which not even his imagination is powerful enough to illumine, up to the ultimate sublimities of transfigured imagery and creative phrase. One is sufficiently familiar with his cataloguing method. This strain and fibre in his verse is usually the first charge to be brought against him in any indictment of his poetry. Undoubtedly for Whitman himself this pell-mell of names and things had a certain imaginative value, as representing the infinite diversity of the universe. But no less undoubtedly it has not the same value for the reader. Art is not the bald reproduction of actuality. Art interprets, and makes vital what was before inert; it translates material into mood. In his uninspired moments — of which there

were many — Whitman gives us not the impression and spirit of chaos, its import for the emotions, but chaos itself, actual and unredeemed. Often, however, in these very catalogues, he lifts the single item out of itself, translating the object into sensation and kindling it with the glow of his own feeling.

The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp.

What before we may have passed a hundred times without notice is lighted up with a new interest, and we get a quick sting of pleasure. With him we thrill in

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor.

Or that fresh keen sight of his catches a transient group in a vivid flash, arrests it, and makes it permanent because so real. The vividness of the image carries it to our

own experience so that it becomes a vital part of us.

The march of firemen in their own costumes, the play of masculine muscle through clean-setting trowsers and waist-straps,
The slow return from the fire, the pause when the bell strikes suddenly again, and the listening on the alert,
The natural, perfect, varied attitudes, the bent head, the curv'd neck and the counting.

Examples might be multiplied indefinitely. These swift touches with living reality may or may not repay the reader as he pushes through the jostling crowd of common things. For my part, I do not tire of these little vignettes; in them Whitman gives me a new vision of the world. The commonplace becomes interesting after all; the daily round is richer than I had supposed. Glimpses and images such as these are the upland levels, the wide-stretching plateaus, of Whitman's verse. On the heights he is absolute. The exaltation of his thought and all-fusing intensity of his

emotion compel their own supremely adequate, transfiguring expression. Analysis cannot here penetrate the secret of his alchemy. The critical faculty is annulled as we are caught up in this transcendent flight, lifted out of ourselves until we become the poet. This poetry works its own eternal miracle. The poet's vision is our vision, his mood is our mood; we are, even as he is, on the heights.

Whitman had "the divine power to speak words." On this transfiguring energy of his phrase he rests his first claim upon our attention as readers of poetry. Many of his lines, even whole poems, are mere jottings and fragments, — "glimpses through an interstice caught," — reproducing the inconsequence of momentary experience. Such as these justify themselves by their vividness and their life-communicating quality. Yet to stop here is to stop at the very surface. For underlying the apparently scattered members of

this poetry there is a penetrative and permeating unity, a unity of feeling imparted to discrete objects and sensations by the temperament across which they play. The individual stream of consciousness flows on unbrokenly, though gathering into itself tributary incidents, and swirling into eddies along its borders. "My poems," Whitman says in a manuscript note, "should be a *unity*, in the same sense that the earth is, or that a human body . . . or that a perfect musical composition is." In the last clause we have the key to the second and larger appeal of Whitman's work as poetry. This is its musical quality.

Not only are Whitman's words often unsurpassable for their image-making power, now sharply cutting, now lambent in their caress, effusing emotion and mood. His phrases are sonorous on the tongue, and subtly modulated, and they are distinguished by a tone-color extraordinarily sensuous and musical.

Soothe! soothe! soothe!
Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,
And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one close,
But my love soothes not me, not me.

Here is the hush of sibilants recurring in regular measure: *s*oothe, clo*s*e, it*s*, *s*oothe*s*, embra*c*ing, *s*oothe*s*. Here is the calm of open vowels: s*oo*the, w*a*ve, beh*i*nd, embr*a*cing; a calm broken and so intensified by the huddling consonants, l*a*pp*i*ng e*v*ery o*n*e *c*lo*s*e. Then follow two lines heavy with the weight of the late and lagging moon.

Low hangs the moon, it rose late,
It is lagging — O I think it is heavy with love, with love.

Here the rhythm changes; the beat is slower and more prolonged. Now with crowding consonants, the sea breaks and gently spreads itself on the flow.

O madly the sea pushes upon the land,
With love, with love.

Then ensue the huddle and unrest of close

vowels, thick-studded consonants, and short syllables.

O night! do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers?
What is that little black thing I see there in the white?

Now come the alarm and call of liquids and open vowels.

Loud! loud! loud!
Loud I call to you, my love!
High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,
Surely you must know who is here, is here,
You must know who I am, my love.

Finally,—

Low-hanging moon!
What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?
O it is the shape, the shape of my mate!
O moon do not keep her from me any longer.

Once more the sagging, weary weight of open vowels, and the repeated vibration and prolonged echo of "m" and "n" in hanging moon, brown, moon, from, any longer. Then the abrupt discord in the dentals, sibilants, and close vowels of *dusky spot*. At

last, the long cry in the repetition and the assonance of "the shape, the shape of my mate," ending in the last line with the sob of broken rhythm and sudden lapse.

This mastery of musical effects is not limited to the bar of a single phrase or to the turn of a sentence or brief stanza. Whitman applies it to his work in its larger masses. Characteristically he does not use metre. Individual lines have a certain fluid stress, like the emphasis given to spoken words where the placing of the sense to be emphasized coincides with natural breath-lengths. But the full sweep of his rhythm completes itself only in the larger group of the whole paragraph. Whitman's instinctive feeling for time-values helped him to the right placing of the stress and modulation, but his effects are more than merely mechanical. An emotional influence radiates from his rhythms, given off like an aura, and enveloping them with an atmosphere of mood. In achieving these effects Whitman transcends estab-

lished poetic forms, and takes his clue and his criterion from Nature. He sees all life as a "procession with measured and perfect motion." Correspondingly, the movement of his verse is processional. It is "less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints, and even less than half-tints." His music would compete with the mystic trumpeter, the wind; it would accord with the sweep of the plains and the thrust of mountain-ranges; it would catch and reëcho the ineffable influence of the sea. Traveling in his later years in Colorado, "hour after hour, amid all this grim yet joyous elemental abandon — this plenitude of material, entire absence of art, untrammel'd play of primitive Nature — the chasm, the gorge, the crystal mountain stream, repeated scores, hundreds of miles — the broad handling and absolute uncrampedness — the fantastic forms bathed in transparent browns, faint reds and grays, towering sometimes a thousand, sometimes two or three thousand

feet high — at their tops now and then huge masses pois'd, and mixing with the clouds, with only their outlines, hazed in misty lilac, visible": in the presence of this workmanship transcending art, he exclaims, "I have found the law of my own poems!"

Spirit that form'd this scene,
These tumbled rock-piles grim and red,
These reckless heaven-ambitious peaks,
These gorges, turbulent-clear streams, this naked freshness,
These formless wild arrays, for reasons of their own,
I know thee, savage spirit — we have communed together,
Mine too such wild arrays, for reasons of their own;
Was 't charged against my chants they had forgotten art?
To fuse within themselves its rules precise and delicatesse?
The lyrist's measur'd beat, the wrought-out temple's grace — column and polish'd arch forgot?
But thou that revelest here — spirit that form'd this scene,
They have remember'd thee.

Whitman's rhythms cannot be analyzed according to the established formulas of versification, as pentameter, hexameter; they cannot be subjected to the usual systems of

notation, as iambic, trochaic, dactylic, anapæstic. Rather they are like the rhythms we apprehend in natural processes: they are the rhythms of shifting cloud-forms or of the unresting but measured roll of the sea; they push forward, recoil, and recur like the interweaving of tree-branches, throwing out lateral clusters of twigs and leaves. His rhythms "show the free growth of metrical laws"; they bud loosely, but as unerringly as "lilacs and roses on a bush"; and again, they take shapes as compact as "the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears." By virtue of their very elusiveness they give off an emotional quality shed like a "perfume impalpable to form."

It is certain that Whitman has caught and registered something of the sinuous, mighty pulse of Nature. In art, the nearest parallel of his work is found not in other poetry but in music. The structure of his poems — the statement of theme and of contrasted or subsidiary themes, the ampli-

fication, the recurrence with modification, the inner progress, now delayed by lateral expression, now gathering itself for a new push forward, but certain to the end, all embodied in appropriate rhythms, evoking mood — is symphonic in plan, variety, and scope. Or again, he composes on the model of recitative and aria, as in Italian opera, which he knew so well. Although his rhythms are large and free, leaving "dim escapes and outlets," his poetry does not lack a firm underlying structure and closely woven texture of thought. His verses are not mere succession, they are development. Formal logic Whitman distrusted: "the damp of the night drives deeper into my soul." But his poems, from the first germinal inception in his mind to their final perfect flower of phrase and rhythm, are wrought out with a sure, inevitable logic of thought and emotion which matches the inevitableness of Nature's logic in the growth and final form of tree or vine. Con-

trasted with this free but unerring organic growth, traditional verse-forms are mechanical and cold: the crystal rigidity of the sonnet, the vain intricacy of ballade and villanelle and rondeau, is but gem-cutting. With such verbal dexterity "Leaves of Grass" has nothing in common. In nimbleness of foot and deft jugglery of rhyme, any hundred of verse-makers can outstrip this poet. Tried by the movements and ways of Nature and by the great things in music, Whitman shows himself to be a true master of form.

"Much is said, among artists, of 'the grand style,' as if it were a thing by itself. When a man, artist or whoever, has health, pride, acuteness, noble aspirations, he has the motive elements of the grandest style. The rest is but manipulation (yet that is no small matter)."

Here is a clue to another aspect of Whitman's work,—his craftsmanship and tech-

nique. He was not so innocent as many have supposed him of all that is involved in "manipulation." Seemingly artless and accidental, Whitman was an artist of highest power and a consummate craftsman. To cite a specimen instance of Whitman criticism, a recent writer informs us that his poetical method was "the product of his impatience," and he adds: "If this imputes to him some fraudulency as well as much laziness and conceit, this cannot be helped." As against such ignorant and reckless or malicious assertions as this, Whitman's own note-books and papers show the extreme deliberateness and prodigious pains with which he wrote. No detail was too small to call for his utmost effort to be accurate. Among his papers is a pencil-drawing of a full-rigged ship, with the sails, spars, and ropes all named; it was evidently furnished him at his request by some one who was an authority on the subject: this served as the chart for his little poem,

"Old Age's Ships and Crafty Death's." He studied his materials at first hand, and he learned from the workman himself the technical terminology of his trade. In the volume of "Notes and Fragments" are hundreds of jottings and memoranda of details to be worked into his poems. He has notes of a visit to a forge in the Adirondacks, which he condensed into two lines of the "Song for Occupations." Another is the record of a talk with an old whaleman: from him Whitman learned that the whale has but one calf at a birth. In the 1855 and 1856 editions of "Leaves of Grass," he had a line, "Where the she-whale swims with her calves." In the 1860 edition this is changed to read, "Where the she-whale swims with her calf." The very trivialness of the change is significant; for this is the man who was lazy and impatient!

Another note runs: "Whole Poem. Poem of Insects. Get from Mr. Arkhurst the names of all insects — interweave a train

of thoughts suitable — also trains of words." In the search for words he was untiring. In page after page of books in his possession, single words are underscored in pencil, noted for his own future use. His mind, more active than people realized in this big, easy-going man, was constantly on the alert. He carried with him always some scrap of paper, an old envelope, or odd bits pinned together; anywhere and everywhere, at his carpentering, on ferry-boats or the tops of omnibuses, at the theatre, down by the seashore, in the war hospitals, or basking in the sunshine by a creek, wherever he was, he made endless jottings and notes. These were carefully worked over, declaimed, weighed, revised, readjusted, before they were finally incorporated into a poem. His poetry was no chance of hit or miss. As his phrases were not the ejaculations of a fine frenzy, but were the final patient selection out of many that might just do, so the poem as a whole was definitely conceived

and deliberately planned. Here is a scheme outlined in a fragment.

"Poem (idea), 'To struggle is not to suffer.'

"Bold and strong invocation of suffering — to try how much one can stand.

"Overture — a long list of words — the sentiment of suffering, oppression, despair, anguish.

"Collect (rapidly present) terrible scenes of suffering.

"'Then man is a God.' Then he walks over all."

After a poem was more or less in shape, it was subjected, as his manuscripts abundantly show, to numerous and thoroughgoing revisions before it was admitted to his book; and even there, as "Leaves of Grass" went through successive editions, he made many changes and improvements. In a manuscript note for his own guidance he wrote: —

"In future 'Leaves of Grass.' *Be more severe* with the final revision of the poem, nothing will do, not one word or sentence, that is not *perfectly*

clear — with positive purpose — harmony with the name, nature, drift of the poem. Also *no ornaments*, especially *no ornamental adjectives*, unless they have come molten hot, and imperiously prove themselves. *No ornamental similes at all — not one: perfect transparent clearness*, sanity and health are wanted — *that* is the *divine style* — O if it can be attained — "

Whitman's departure from the established forms of poetry, therefore, was not due to fraudulency or laziness, in spite of those who tell us glibly that he did not "even take the trouble to write prose." Nor was it effected in any spirit of license. More than most versifiers, Whitman recognized the necessity of law. The difference is that he goes deeper than most, in perceiving that the true law of art is obedience, not to external form, but to inner essential needs. As a tree grows and takes its perfect shape and beauty in response to the law of its own being, so poetry is not made but grows; it develops out of its own inner

necessity, in so far as the poet is not meddlesome but consents to be "the free channel of himself." But as a tree, in the expression of its being, is subjected to the forces and conditions of the materials out of which it builds itself, so poetry also accepts the laws and conditions of its nature. Art is a spirit; technique — the processes by which art is given bodily form — employs materials. Art, therefore, in the conscious and material elements of it, is based on science.

"Exact science," says Whitman, "and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet, but always his encouragement and support. . . . The sailor and traveler — the anatomist, chemist, astronomer, geologist, phrenologist, spiritualist, mathematician, historian, and lexicographer, are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets, and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem." Again he says, "The work of the poet is as deep as the astronomer's or engineer's, and his art is also as far-fetch'd."

In his very recognition and acceptance of the laws of his art, the poet shows himself master, and then he bends the laws to his own will. "A great poet is followed by laws — they conform to him." True art is not conformity, but mastery.

Whitman did not, as some have fancied, cultivate eccentricity for its own sake. His break with traditional forms and the admitted canons of literature was not due to caprice or a desire for singularity. It was inevitable; and the differences which distinguish his work from other poetry follow necessarily from his point of view, his aims, and his choice and use of his material and medium. "As I have lived," he says, "in fresh lands, inchoate, and in a revolutionary age, future-founding, I have felt to identify the points of that age, these lands, in my recitatives, altogether in my own way. Thus my form has strictly grown from my purports and facts, and is the analogy of them." He will avoid all that is remote,

imported, traditional, and derived; he begins at the beginning. He will make his poems in "the spirit that comes from the contact with real things themselves," as distinct from "the study of pictures of things"; and he will be "faithful to the perfect likelihoods of Nature." His ultimate ideal of style is simplicity. "To speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art." By such untrammeled intimacy with Nature and absorption of her spirit, and by such immediate simplicity of diction, the poet achieves originality. Originality is not a mechanical trick of speech, nor does it reside in external form. It is born of the spirit, and it must show itself "in new combinations and new meanings where there was before thought no greatness. The style of expression must be carefully purged of

anything striking or dazzling or ornamental —and with great severity precluded from all that is eccentric." In the result Whitman is truly original,—a new personality and a new voice in literature.

Whitman was a pioneer and had his work to do for himself. With so vast a programme, with forms to be invented, and with so much crude material to be fused, it is not to be supposed that he maintains a level or that he is invariably beautiful or convincing. He undertook too much. Neither he nor his public was ripe for the achievement. In spite of his heroic effort and limitless good-will, his material was still too stubborn to yield wholly to such transmuting energy as his alchemy could command. He might have cast away the dross and left the gold, but this he was unwilling to do. Instead, he cheerfully proclaimed the dross to be as good as gold, and not every reader agrees with him. The

human vision is not yet divine vision; and man's mind has not yet the power to grasp the Whole, in which opposites are reconciled. Good and evil are still set in conflict; and we still distinguish between the excellent and the inferior. So it is evident to any reader of Whitman that much of his work is mistaken in theory and unredeemed in practice. Even his admirers recognize this element, and this much they freely concede to critics in the opposite camp. To be sure, those who hold Whitman as primarily a prophet are not greatly troubled by it, for they value him for the content of his message, with less regard to its form. But those who consider him as at his best a poet of the highest order are not blind to this admixture in his work of the prosaic and the bizarre. When Stevenson remarks that "the word 'hatter' cannot be used seriously in emotional verse," most of us are quite ready to agree with him. We are disposed to feel that in so far as Whitman was

unable or unwilling to be his own critic and editor, in so far as he failed to select and to reject, so far he failed of being an artist. As it happens, Whitman was an extraordinarily shrewd and penetrating literary critic, as many passages in his prose-writings abundantly prove. Setting aside the question of Whitman's ability in the matter, our attitude toward "Leaves of Grass," with our consequent estimate of it, depends upon whether we regard the book from the poet's point of view or our own. Doubtless, if Whitman had done this or had not done that, it would have pleased you or me better. But after all the question is, what his work finally means to us on the basis of what it pleased Whitman actually to do. He accepted in himself the full responsibility for his performance in its entirety; and we may take him as he is, without speculation as to what he might have been if only he had been something else.

Taking Whitman as he is, then, we per-

ceive that "Leaves of Grass" is a growth, the slow unfolding through the years of the central germinal thought, conceived in its total unity in the beginning, and finding lateral and upward expression, leaf upon leaf, in due succession. Many of the single poems are quite complete in themselves; and these successive expressions may be received in their momentary completeness; as such, they are satisfying, often surpassingly beautiful. The poem entitled "Reconciliation," for example, may be read by itself to powerful effect; yet it acquires infinitely fuller meaning if set in its place in the whole series of "Drum Taps." Just so, we miss the larger significance of Whitman's book if we fail to realize that it is not a mere aggregate of particulars, or accidental, loose accretion of random ideas. "Leaves of Grass" is not, as some critics would have us believe, a scrap-book or a rag-bag, into which Whitman tossed his odds and ends of thoughts and phrases,

which he did not trouble himself to classify and to elaborate coherently. "Leaves of Grass" is organic, and a whole; its parts are held together in vital interrelation; and it is to be received and comprehended only in its entirety. The poet aims to figure forth the eternal flux of things, the wonderful diversity of life, and the greater wonder of the unity underlying it. His style, beyond any other characteristic of it, is fluid; and his poems are crowded with jostling, heterogeneous materials and images. Yet embraced by the cosmic sweep of his absorbing and interpreting personality, all things fall naturally into place, and diversity is fused into unity. Leaves of grass: one spirit, many manifestations. As in Nature, so in this poetry, not all is flower and fruit; much is shaggy bark, and knotted, tough-fibred wood. There are passages of supreme poetry, unmatchable for sublimity of thought and compelling beauty of phrase. Mingled with them are reaches of prose,

— prose that is incoherent in structure, commonplace in wording, and banal in thought. But it is not upon a part, however triumphant the part may be, that Whitman rests his case. He would not have us cull the blossoms, to deck a room for a day; nor try to skip from peak to peak in Olympian disdain. We leave the blossoms out of doors, and love the tree, which will drop fruit in its own time. We possess the landscape, — morasses and tangled lowlands, no less than the mountain-tops. In such a survey, necessarily we take the bad with the good, the nonsense with the divine sense, the banal with the sublime. We accept the "hatter," "Cudge that hoes in the sugar-field," "Kanuck," and "Tuckahoe"; and we give thanks for "the light that wraps me in delicate equable showers," for "the sun falling around a helpless thing," and for "the huge and thoughtful night." We take the cosmos as we find it, and try, with such grace as

we can command, to make the necessary adjustments. The recompense is certain and enough.

"A stretch of interminable white-brown sand, hard and smooth and broad, with the ocean perpetually, grandly, rolling in upon it, with slow-measured sweep, with rustle and hiss and foam, and many a thump as of low bass-drums."

This scene, Whitman says, though wholly imaginary, for years at intervals came up before him; it entered largely into his practical life, and into his writings to shape and color them. The picture is a symbol of "Leaves of Grass."

Whitman's poetry is like the sea. It has the same amplitude and power, the same unbridled swing, the same variety and unity-in-variety; it is spacious and composite; it has the sea's movement and stir, its immediacy and its suggestions of infinity beyond. We plunge into it, to encounter a shock; the first recoil is followed by a sense of

exhilaration and of escape out of cramping manners and dress into the nakedness of a wider, bigger element. The sea was for Whitman the symbol of the cosmos, and the criterion by which to test reality.

Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,
. . . . . .
Metre or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in
perfect rhyme, delight of singers;
These, these, O sea, all these I 'd gladly barter,
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me
transfer,
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
And leave its odor there.

The impression of Whitman's poetry in the large is vastness and freedom. It is essentially a poetry of out-of-doors. His performance can "face the open fields and the sea-side"; it meets "the broadcast doings of the day and night." Whitman gets his inspiration from Nature and natural men. He prefers the companionship of mechanics, boatmen, farmers, to the society of drawing-rooms and libraries. Not parts

of men but whole men, simplicity, candor, liberality, things as God made them, are what he likes. He loves movement and masses and variety and space. The sea held him by its illimitableness; and great cities too, like Brooklyn and New York, drew him powerfully by their sheer immensity of scale. Thus he says: —

"The splendor, picturesqueness, and oceanic amplitude and rush of these great cities, the unsurpass'd situation, rivers and bay, sparkling seatides, costly and lofty new buildings, façades of marble and iron, of original grandeur and elegance of design, with the masses of gay color, the preponderance of white and blue, the flags flying, the endless ships, the tumultuous streets, Broadway, the heavy, low, musical roar, hardly ever intermitted, even at night; the jobbers' houses, the rich shops, the wharves, the great Central Park, and the Brooklyn Park of hills (as I wander among them this beautiful fall weather, musing, watching, absorbing) — the assemblages of the citizens in their groups, conversations,

trades, evening amusements, or along the by-quarters — these, I say, and the like of these, completely satisfy my senses of power, fulness, motion, &c., and give me through such senses and appetites, and through my æsthetic conscience, a continued exaltation and absolute fulfilment."

To match the infinitely shifting diversity of things, which Whitman feels so vividly, his poetic form is composite and indeterminate. It has "the loose-clear-crowdedness" of the night sky. The peculiar value of this form is suggestiveness. His purposes are as obvious and as intricate as Nature's are. Superficially "Leaves of Grass" is a maze of contradictions, though the underlying unity is finally there. So, in spite of his manifest assertiveness and loud voice, Whitman is curiously reticent; elusive and baffling he is, so that we never quite fathom his ultimate reserve. We sound him again and again and yet again, and do not touch bottom. There are "divine things

well envelop'd." Where other poetry is static, Whitman is dynamic. It has seemed to me that perhaps the most perfect little poem in English is Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Here content is absolutely matched by form; here thought and emotion and the manner of expression are in exquisite equilibrium. But the equilibrium is stable. I read the Ode and find it superlatively beautiful; I read it again and find it just as beautiful, but not more so: it is complete, — here, now, once, and for all time. The very perfection of it is its limitation. I read Whitman, and he seems to me wonderful; I read him again, and he seems more wonderful, ever more and more wonderful, disclosing new wonder and beauty without end. Keats's Ode is a supreme triumph of art. Whitman challenges comparison with Nature. His poetry is compounded of "influences that make up, in their limitless field, that perennial health-action of the air we call the

weather — an infinite number of currents and forces, and contributions, and temperatures, and cross-purposes, whose ceaseless play of counterpart upon counterpart brings constant restoration and vitality." Hence the irresistibly tonic quality of this poetry, its power to stimulate and to supply.

The wide scope and the free form of Whitman's work permit the play of many purposes and the inclusion of diverse materials. In "Leaves of Grass," taken in its entirety, we may distinguish three elements. The first is prose, — a commonplaceness of thought, the use of familiar things in all their unrelieved familiarity, and a literalness of phrasing; this element is the bed-soil of his verse. The second element is the direct statement of ideas; under this head we have his championship of Democracy and his aggressive glorification of "these States," his critical propaganda, with his programme for a new order of literature, and his philosophic beliefs. An example of this strain is, —

Did we think victory great?
So it is — but now it seems to me, when it cannot be
help'd, that defeat is great,
And that death and dismay are great.

Such sentences are sown broadcast throughout the "Leaves." Often there is literary distinction in the phrasing, but the manner does not differ from the manner of a prose essay. Whitman's attitude here is intellectual rather than emotional; his method is assertion. We agree with him or disagree, as the case may be. If we do not accept his dictum, he does not persuade us in spite of ourselves by any beauty of image; he does not kindle us with any glow of emotion. The ideas are valued for themselves, without regard to their form. This element is the stalk and tough fibre of his verse. The third element, redeeming the whole and making it glorious, is the radiant flower and perfect fruit: this is his *poetry*. Whitman himself knows as well as another that "real materials do not become real until touched by

emotions, the mind." In his passages of true poetry, — and they compensate for all the rest, — ideas are kindled by feeling and lighted by imagination. Here content is not to be disengaged from the form. This poetry has the fusing and transfiguring power that is characteristic of all great art. Some of the sources of this power I have tried to indicate. In the result it makes its way, triumphantly, supremely.

Such are the currents of energy that pulse through the oceanic tides of Whitman's verse. There are cross-currents and contradictory forces. To be caught and swept along by a single current is to be carried out of our course. If we are to fare with Whitman from port to port, from birth through life to death and beyond, we must keep our bearings. So "Leaves of Grass" is to be truly apprehended and appreciated only in its entirety; the part is to be referred to the whole. "I am large; I contain multitudes." Our enjoyment of Whitman is the

measure of our own capacity. Like the sea's horizon, his bounds are traced by the range of our own vision. The ocean's verge advances ever before us with our progress; and there is ever an infinite beyond.

The sky o'erarches here, we feel the undulating deck beneath our feet,
We feel the long pulsation, ebb and flow of endless motion,
The tones of unseen mystery, the vague and vast suggestions of the briny world, the liquid-flowing syllables,
The perfume, the faint creaking of the cordage, the melancholy rhythm,
The boundless vista and the horizon far and dim are all here,
And this is ocean's poem.

III

THE HUMAN APPEAL

Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of
the tenderest lover,
The friend the lover's portrait, of whom his friend his
lover was fondest,
Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measure-
less ocean of love within him, and freely pour'd
it forth.

A TANGLED growth from wide fields, — tough-fibred strands, gleaming in the sun, bending to the sweep of winds, tossing and falling in variant rhythm like waves over the sea, — this is the symbol and expression of a vast and elemental personality. The impression is one of expanse and freedom, of infinite complexity enfolded within a dominant unity. There are shifting vistas and far horizons; many crests are salient, flashing light; with the bigness and diversity, there is also a wonderful sense of inti-

macy. Somewhere within, at the very centre, quickens a compelling force, exerting an irresistible attraction. The appeal is as sovereign as it is varied. Many phases, one essence. At the heart of it is power.

The secret of Whitman's power does not reside in his craftsmanship. His poetry holds for its readers the delight which art brings, in satisfaction of the æsthetic sense. But his art alone does not exhaust his significance. His verses are musical with subtle rhythms and with melodies cunningly wrought; woven of colored words and luminous images, they fill the eye like landscape, and move in multiform procession like the pageant of the day and night. But however his technique may be characterized, it is enough for Whitman that his art is adequate for his purpose. By means of it he communicates himself. His purpose is to establish between himself and his readers an immediately personal relation, so that they may share with him his experi-

ence of life. He is not satisfied, therefore, merely to create beautiful forms. Truly he is not proud of his songs, but of the measureless ocean of love within him. In effect his art carries beyond itself. "No one," he says, "will get at my verses who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance, or attempt at such performance, or as aiming mainly toward art or æstheticism." The secret of his power lies in the man.

But Whitman's power is not wholly of himself. No one ever gave more freely than Whitman gives, scattering with lavish hand all that he receives. The wealth of his personality is immense. Great currents of energy and love flow from him and prevail, like the slow, sure, vitalizing forces of the earth; they envelop, attract, and quicken all things in the contact. But these influences do not originate in him. The man himself is not the source, but the appointed channel of currents that are universal. Whitman holds his powerful, responding

personality as it were in trust, for service in a cause. At the very inception of his great undertaking, before he sets himself definitely to the composition of "Leaves of Grass," there is granted to him an insight into the meaning of things. He is vouchsafed a vision of God, and there is revealed to him in awe and splendor the divine purpose in the world. Apprehending now the universal laws and resting upon them, he establishes himself a centre in relation to the whole of life. Identifying himself with Nature's processes, as one of them, he becomes an instrument. The great animating spirit of the universe works through him as it works through skies, through spreading landscapes and the myriad life that peoples them, through seas and mountains, through rocks and trees and the curling grass. He sees in himself and in them "the same old law." Whitman mingles with the crowd as few men have mingled. But the reason why his gift is so precious

and so potent is because he draws upon the universal source. Before he gives, he finds himself. "Will you seek afar off? you surely come back at last." He is not dispersed and lost in "countless masses of adjustments." The truth is not out there, but in one's self. But the self is truly possessed only as it is merged again in universal ends. So it is that in fullest and highest service of the cause, he permits "to speak at every hazard Nature without check with original energy." His whole being, every wave of impression and emotion, every act, is authenticated with the seal of Nature. When he speaks, the converging authority of the universe weights his words. Nature has chosen him for her prophet, and she fashioned him to the work.

Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me.

. . . . . .

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

Whitman is a man of quite exceptional endowment. His whole make-up, physical, mental, and emotional, is a fortunate gift, —a temperament formed to be played upon by the throbbing influences of things, and to vibrate responsively in rhythm and happy accord. His physical senses are extraordinarily acute; and this acuteness of sense deepens into a sensibility, a refinement of perception and exquisiteness of feeling, uncommon with a man of such superb bodily health. This sensibility, however, does not diffuse itself and spend its force in vague, unregulated emotion. His sensations are controlled, his emotion is mastered and directed, by his triumphant powers of mind. He is able everywhere and always to make life count. Indifferent which chance happens, he follows where the way leads. Unpremeditated and undesigned things come to him haphazard. With sublime faith he drifts. But this random contact with the world he shapes

to unified experience, ever widening, ever deepening, and profoundly consistent with itself. The chaos of momentary living does not overwhelm him: at any point he can turn and say, This is life. He sees it as a whole, and he finds a meaning for it. Himself eternally and unshakably greater than what happens to him, he masters life. This unified experience he is able to record and to communicate. So the man becomes a poet.

Whitman is the poet of health and the joy of health. As he defines it in retrospect, he sees that his purpose has been "to formulate a poem whose every thought or fact should directly or indirectly be or connive at an implicit belief in the wisdom, health, mystery, beauty of every process, every concrete object, every human or other existence, not only consider'd from the point of view of all, but of each." His own health, up to the prostration that followed the superhuman strain of the War,

was perfect; when his bodily strength was finally broken, he still kept his power and unconquerable cheerfulness of mind and his sweet sanity of spirit. Undoubtedly the basis of Whitman's attitude toward life, and in part the secret of his magnetism, is his physical equipment. Immediate contact with things, so keen and so finely attuned are his senses, is inexhaustible delight. The air tastes good to his palate. He thrills to the float and odor of hair, and he discriminates the exquisite smell of the earth at daybreak, and all through the forenoon. He hears the bustle of growing wheat, and the labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals; the moon descends the steeps of the soughing twilight. To the sense of touch he is peculiarly responsive.

I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me,
I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy.

He reaches to the leafy lips of white, sweet-scented roses and to the polished breasts of melons. "Press close magnetic nourishing night!" he cries; and to the sea he calls,—

> Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,
> Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you.

On this count alone,—though there are other reasons as well,—it is easy to understand Whitman's glorification of the body. Theoretically, as one clause of his philosophic programme, he holds the body to be sacred; for it is the expression of the soul and the necessary condition of finite existence. But he celebrates the body also for the joy he has in it. For him, as for all things in Nature, health is happiness. In this respect, therefore, Whitman is neither indecent nor immodest. All natural functions are to him equally beautiful and sweet. Seeking to come as close to Nature as he can, when occasion offers, he gloriously divests himself, and becomes

"undisguised and naked." In a secluded nook along Timber Creek he basks in aboriginal directness in the beneficent sun; and up and down the lonely shores of Long Island his bared body defies the wind and the sea. In this way, as he says, somehow he seems to get identity with each and everything around him, in its condition. And he adds,—

"Perhaps the inner never-lost rapport we hold with earth, light, air, trees, &c., is not to be realized through eyes and mind only, but through the whole corporeal body. . . . Perhaps indeed he or she to whom the free exhilarating extasy of nakedness in Nature has never been eligible (and how many thousands there are!) has not really known what purity is — nor what faith or art or health really is."

This nakedness in Nature is for Whitman a delicious primal fact. He absorbs the cosmos veritably through his pores, and in turn the magnetic currents of the earth radiate from him as from a centre.

But it is a symbol as well. It is expressive of the original and unmediated relation of each individual to his world. "Undrape!" is Whitman's call to the body. Let life flow in unhindered. But not for the body's sake alone. The senses are the gateway to the soul.

Nature and natural things! In this intimate, fresh, delighted contact with out-of-doors, Whitman learns the secret of life. The issue is happiness. His attitude toward the world is less a creed or reasoned conviction than it is the inevitable reaction of his temperament. His regnant happiness is primarily natural and instinctive; his relation to life follows upon the kind of man he is. In so far as he has a philosophy, it is a supreme acceptance of things as they are. To the reception of life he brings an immense capacity for joy. Beyond most men he has a gift for being pleased. "Wherever I have been, I have charged myself with contentment and tri-

umph." This dominant happiness he finds in his sense of vital kinship with all things. He is sublimely at home in the universe. Vividly and immediately he feels and practically knows "the harmony of things with man." Where ordinarily in one's life one is conscious only of separateness and division, holding the external world and its assaults and impacts to be irreconcilably at war with one's own individuality, Whitman on the contrary feels that he is a necessary and living part of the cosmic whole. In terms of actual experience he realizes

Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next,
Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all.

Were it not for this sense of kinship with it all, the vastness and the beauty of it would overwhelm him, but he confronts all the shows he sees out of the stronger wealth of himself.

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me,
If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me.

Whitman feels himself coextensive with the universe. If we fail to see the world as beautiful in its every aspect and detail, it is only because of our consciousness of separateness: we think that Nature is different from us and hostile to us. The big things are too big for us and disquiet us with the unwilling realization of our own littleness; and the little things are discordant, for we cannot fit them into our experience. Hence the blindness and the pain. But Whitman finds only happiness, for he has the clef which resolves all discords into harmony. Because he makes common cause with Nature, because he too is a channel of cosmic influences, he discovers a clue to the eternal meanings. In his union with other parts is revealed the unity of the whole; his adjustment to the world-order and his happiness therein are the proof of the ultimate rightness of all things, each in its own place.

Whitman has in himself the instinctive

and absolute rightness of all natural things. His equilibrium is perfect. At the same time that he is able to give himself freely, yet without loss, he becomes also a centre of attraction for all that is natural and genuine. Out of the abundance of the universal wealth of which he is the channel and instrument, he lavishes himself upon all, and just as inevitably they are drawn to him in return. "These tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them." He convinces by his presence. As unconsciously as one breathes, he absorbs all things into himself, and every sentient being that comes within his range submits to the gentle compulsion of his personality. He spends whole mornings in bright summer weather, watching the butterflies skimming, dipping, oscillating, circling, mounting, "holding a revel, a gyration-dance or butterfly good-time." He makes friends with them. "I have one big and handsome moth down here, knows and comes to me, likes me to hold him up

on my extended hand." Another time up along the Hudson, he falls in with a hermit. "I first met him once or twice on the road, and pass'd the time of day, with some small talk; then, the third time, he ask'd me to go along a bit and rest in his hut (an almost unprecedented compliment, as I heard from others afterwards)." As he is sitting in Central Park, looking on at the varied endless show, a policeman comes over and stands near him. "We grow quite friendly and chatty forthwith." He tells Whitman, in answer to his questions, all about the life of a New York park-policeman, the pay, the hours, the duties. In noting the incident he makes this comment:

"Few appreciate, I have often thought, the Ulyssean capacity, derring-do, quick readiness in emergencies, practicality, unwitting devotion and heroism, among our American young men and working-people — the firemen, the railroad employés, the steamer and ferry men, the police, the conductors and drivers — the whole splendid average of native stock, city and country."

Ever the most precious in the common! It is always this element of the *natural* that Whitman represents in himself and that he discerns and prizes in others. If Whitman discriminates at all in the outpouring of his sympathy, it is in favor of the common people. Nature is the great Mother, and the source of all that is best in life. So Whitman has a special love for the common people, for they are closest to the earth: there is less in the way between them and reality, and they are more likely to be and to express what Nature intends. It is in this spirit that Whitman thinks he could turn and live with the animals, they are so self-contained. He goes freely with "powerful, uneducated persons," not because they are uneducated, but because they are powerful, and because their power is not suppressed and nullified by the restraints which a formal training tends to impose. The issue at stake, however, is not this or that external condition

of life, but sincerity, — being honestly and frankly, for better or worse, one's self. The distinction is not one of class or station, but inheres in the man himself.

Because of his passion for the natural and the real, Whitman seems for the moment unable to include within his sympathy the indoor, and from his point of view artificial, products of civilization and culture. He enfolds with a boundless love the outcast, the despised, the felon; for, as himself a child of generous, tolerant Nature, he feels that he is of them and belongs to them. "Henceforth I will not deny them, for how can I deny myself?" But it is hard for him sympathetically to justify in the scheme of things those who themselves think they need no justification. Even for these, however, he has no condemnation, but only pity. For he regards their mere culture and consequent self-sufficiency as a barrier which separates them from the best that life might otherwise hold for them.

Of persons arrived at high positions, ceremonies, wealth, scholarships, and the like;
(To me all that those persons have arrived at sinks away from them, except as it results to their bodies and souls,
. . . . . .
And often to me those men and women pass unwittingly the true realities of life, and go toward false realities,
And often to me they are alive after what custom has served them, but nothing more,
And often to me they are sad, hasty, unwaked somnambules walking the dusk.)

Not only do such external and mechanical acquisitions cut men off from the bigger things, from sympathy that springs out of the heart, from love and the happiness that comes with the gift of one's self; Whitman feels keenly the utter inadequacy of mere learning to help men to the truths which he himself has divined so deeply through love, the truths which Nature would teach, if only men would surrender to her and let her work in them in her own way. Hearing the learned astronomer, with his proofs and figures and

charts and diagrams, unaccountably he became "tired and sick," and rising and gliding out, he wandered off by himself—

In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

In the company of conventional and indoor people Whitman was confessedly less at ease than in the open, in so far as suited his freedom of movement and expression. But he was great enough to discern the good and true qualities latent in them, however much these were overlaid by broadcloth and trimmed to the mode. "The little plentiful mannikins skipping around in collars and tail'd coats," he was aware who they are; in the measure that they could receive it, he had a word for them. But for the most part they turned their superior backs upon him; that there could be any culture outside of colleges and drawing-rooms seemed to them absurd. But this man of the streets saw further than they. Whitman had erudition, though it was acquired in his own way, not

in the schools; it was much more extensive than people supposed, for he held it cheap in comparison with the realities of life. With him, learning was quite incidental to living: he guessed ulterior values. The best culture, as Whitman conceives it, is "that of the manly and courageous instincts, and loving perceptions, and of self-respect." It is not limited to parlors and lecture-rooms, but applies to the conduct of the common daily round of duties and affairs. To this culture any man is eligible. It consists not in the acquisition of facts, but in the discipline of the intelligence through contact with real things, in the deepening of the sympathies, and in self-mastery. The fruits of it are not information and social address, but personality; its richest recompense inures to the soul. Whitman's learning did not stop with itself; his experience of life, many-sided and profound, issued in wisdom. He knew, as learned men often do not know, that

Wisdom is not finally tested in schools,
Wisdom cannot be pass'd from one having it to another not having it,
Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is its own proof.
Applies to all stages and objects and qualities and is content,
Is the certainty of the reality and immortality of things, and the excellence of things.

It was not the erudite and self-sufficient people, as people, that Whitman questioned; it was their erudition and their self-sufficiency that he rejected, for the very sake of the learned ones themselves.

This exception made, if it be really an exception, Whitman gives himself unreservedly, with the uncalculating lavishness of Nature. A great sustaining sympathy streams from him like light from the sun, and envelops all men, the just and the unjust, in its quickening flood. What is thus primarily natural and inevitable with him, Whitman elevates into a conscious principle of conduct. The practical solution of

all the complexities of human relations he finds in comradeship. Emotionally, this bond of union between man and man, or man and woman indifferently, is completely satisfying; for comradeship includes not only friendship, sympathy, and adhesiveness, but also love in the largest sense. With Whitman, the love of man for woman is a comparatively simple matter. He does not trouble himself with its psychology, all its infinite subtleties and shades. He takes it quite innocently and frankly, as Nature intends it, as the means of fulfilling her ultimate design. Whitman, it must be conceded, is not a woman's poet. The glory of motherhood he celebrates with a divine enthusiasm and cosmic rejoicing; this august mission and destiny that is hers lifts woman to the highest station in the universal order. But in all the other and, as it seems to him, lesser relations of life, she does not enter into his scheme. The recondite, intricate play of a woman's mind and

feeling is removed from his observation; the recesses of her heart, flashed open to the touch of love, are closed to him. He quite ignores the countless sensitive adjustments involved in the relation of man to woman. Whitman conceives woman in the large: she is not the beloved, hardly even the wife, but the heroic mother of stalwart men. Her status is thus defined with an entire simplicity; and she figures in his poetry with a corresponding mass and breadth. Whitman places woman with reference to his own conception of universal purposes and ends; she stands as a type and an instrument. He reckons with woman, but not with women. So far as regards immediate practical life in terms of her individual experience of it, Whitman clearly has not a woman's point of view. He takes her as more and as less than she feels herself to be. He makes too much of the great things and not enough of the little. He sees her as cosmic, and fails to understand

her; she is willing to be only human, if only she is loved.

In so far as Whitman is unable to interpret woman to herself, and through understanding and sympathy to make her life his own, in that measure of course he misses theoretic completeness and fails to close the circle of experience. But in practice, so far as concerns his own reaction, the break is not absolute. For the same enthusiasm, imagination, romance, and poetry that are commonly accorded to love, he lavishes upon comradeship. With Whitman, comradeship is at once an ideal and a passion. Into this relation he pours all the emotionalism in which his full nature is so rich. In sentiment, in fervor, in all the transfiguring emotions that make life new and glorious, comradeship lacks nothing. It supplies him a happiness that is purely physical, it is so actual and immediate.

I have perceiv'd that to be with those I like is enough,
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough,

To be surrounded by beautiful, curious, breathing, laughing flesh is enough,
To pass among them or touch any one, or rest my arm ever so lightly round his or her neck for a moment, what is this then?
I do not ask any more delight, I swim in it as in a sea.

Comradeship brings him also the satisfaction of his deepest emotional needs. Earth's richest, most majestic shows — the perfect-modeled battleship, the splendors of day and night, the vaunted glory and growth of the great city spread around him — cannot move him like the glimpse he has of two simple men on the pier parting the parting of dear friends. He does not envy the fame of heroes nor the victories of generals, he does not envy the President in his Presidency nor the rich in his great house, —

But when I hear of the brotherhood of lovers, how it was with them,
How together through life, through dangers, odium, unchanging, long and long,
Through youth and through middle and old age, how unfaltering, how affectionate and faithful they were,
Then I am pensive — I hastily walk away fill'd with the bitterest envy.

Not reputation and applause, not material possessions, not culture, nor worldly power can offer him the joy and peace he finds in the companionship of his friend. And for all the effort and the struggle, — the price of life in this world, — such friendship as he dreams of and is able to realize, is perfect compensation. Such satisfaction is realized as wisdom, and transcends expression.

When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long while holding me by the hand,
When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense that words and reason hold not, surround us and pervade us,
Then I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom, I am silent, I require nothing further.

Whitman makes of comradeship a new evangel. It is the base of all metaphysics; underneath all philosophies and all gospels he sees "the dear love of man for his comrade." He believes that "the main purport of these States is to found a superb friendship, *exalté*, previously unknown."

Through comradeship, and only so, is Democracy to be realized on any large and enduring scale; therein lies its assurance for the present and its hope for the future. His intention is wholly constructive. Regarding society as it is at present constituted, he refuses to take sides; he renounces all parties, and will not ally himself with existing organizations. He is neither for nor against institutions, but he will establish

> Without edifice or rules or trustees or any argument,
> The institution of the dear love of comrades.

Whitman's terms are becoming somewhat vague here, for he is moving now in uncertain regions of political speculation and social theory; but at the base of his terms there is a definite reality. This reality is practical sympathy. To explicate that sympathy, to reveal its possibilities and make application of it to all relations of life, is a leading motive in "Leaves of Grass." He sent out the book, he says, —

"to set flowing in men's and women's hearts, young and old, endless streams of living, pulsating love and friendship, directly from them to myself, now and ever. To this terrible, irrepressible yearning, (surely more or less down underneath in most human souls) — this never-satisfied appetite for sympathy, and this boundless offering of sympathy — this universal democratic comradeship — this old, eternal, yet ever-new interchange of adhesiveness, so fitly emblematic of America — I have given in that book, undisguisedly, declaredly, the openest expression."

And he adds: —

"It is by a fervent, accepted development of comradeship, the beautiful and sane affection of man for man, . . . that the United States of the future are to be most effectually welded together, intercalated, anneal'd into a living union."

Thus Whitman interprets the world and construes human relationships out of his own nature. Life is for him always "a poem of new joys," because he is in himself so

perfectly at one with the forces and influences that play through all natural things. His response to their impact is a complete harmony that issues in happiness. In the same spirit of trust and joy that he yields to the persuasions of the external world, he gives himself to his fellows. The grateful love which floods his being overflows universally. He is not held by the ties of mere kinship: all men are in the deepest and truest sense his brothers. He is not limited to a few chosen intimacies, to the exclusion of the mass outside. There are no strangers now; there are only comrades. Attachment and devotion usurp the place of enmity, and banish fear. His friend and lover is the one with whom he happens to be. This humanly accidental, divinely intended, companionship is enough. "He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied me." It is difficult to conceive the inclusiveness of Whitman's sympathy; it is impossible to measure its beneficence. That

sympathy is living and potent to-day, not only through the miracle of the printed page, but bridging in its impetus the chasm of death, and triumphing in its intensity over time and distance. To know Whitman is to feel it, and to go one's way enriched and enheartened.

This is the human appeal of Whitman. But a word still remains to be spoken. Accepting life as it is with thankfulness and joy, he yet interprets it in terms of spiritual values. The power of which he is the reverent and happy instrument is of God.

IV

THE SOUL'S ADVENTURE

We too take ship O soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O soul,)
Caroling free, singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

IMMENSE as were the satisfactions which befell Walt Whitman on his leisurely way through the world, yet his whole life, in the inner meaning of it, figures itself as an eager, unremitted quest. So potent is his immediately human appeal, that this good comrade does not at once reveal himself as a spiritual pioneer. Those who knew him in the life were drawn to him irresistibly by the undefinable attraction of his presence, without perhaps divining

the true sources of his poise and power. Something more than his compelling personal magnetism, however, distinguishes him from the mass: there are depths, of which his abounding sympathy is but the overflow and expression. Endowed though he was with an heroic physique of singular perfection and beauty, yet the essential fibre of his nature is spiritual. He realizes practically, and to an extent that it is granted only to a chosen few to realize, that the central reality of being is the soul. The motive force of his life is the passion and the struggle to possess the soul's inheritance. Gladly upon this high adventure he dares all, risks all, suffers all. His happiness is to pursue the quest. His recompense is to know God.

Whitman is launched upon experience as one in love with life, in all its multitudinousness. Indoors or out, in art or in nature, all sights and sounds, all contacts, all odors and tastes, in solitude or with

companions, in the rush of streets, across the fields and hillsides, or by the sea, whatever and wherever, — it is a wonderful and vivid rapture.

> How curious ! how real !
> Underfoot the divine soil, overhead the sun.

But Whitman is aware too of another reality. Out of the welter emerges an entity in contrast and seeming opposition to the external order. However curious and real this outer world and its actualities and excitements, yet "they are not the Me myself." Experience resolves itself, therefore, into two realities, the soul and that other that is not the soul.

> I and this mystery, here we stand.

But how to reconcile the contrast, and in the opposition to find peace? Undaunted, Whitman confronts the mystery. To the fullest reaches of his strength he undergoes "the vehement struggle so fierce for unity in oneself." But not in himself only. For his great heart leaps out to the

throng and press of human agonies, and the long file of the sons of men passes before his vision, —

Wandering, yearning, curious, with restless explorations,
With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts,
With that sad incessant refrain, *Wherefore unsatisfied soul?* and *Whither O mocking life?*

Insatiably the soul thus questions life. Few men have had so great a measure of happiness as Whitman compassed, but few have finally gone so deep to win it. His happiness is not achieved upon the merely human plane of instant desires and fleeting gratifications: it is fundamental, and of the soul. It comes of the harmony he is able actually to realize with the "mighty, elemental throes, in which and upon which we float, and every one of us is buoy'd." Along the way, he knows what it is to suffer. He knows what it means to be alone. It is granted him to taste the joys of life, — the lavishness of Nature's goods,

and the fruitions of love and comradeship. He knows, too, the sustaining power of faith and hope. But lacking yet one thing, these are not enough. There is still the insistent, ever-recurring question, To what end? Not here, not there, is the answer, but within and above. Out of finite human isolation the soul finds completion in the infinite; by surrender it achieves. God is all,—"is immanent in every life and object, may-be at many and many-a-more removes,"—yet God is there.

Has the estray wander'd far? Is the reason-why strangely hidden?
Would you sound below the restless ocean of the entire world?
Would you know the dissatisfaction? the urge and spur of every life;
The something never still'd—never entirely gone? the invisible need of every seed?

It is the central urge in every atom,
(Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen,)
To return to its divine source and origin, however distant,
Latent the same in subject and in object, without one exception.

This is the soul's adventure — to find God. The voyage is far and perilous across the uncharted spaces, but resolute, the soul fares forth.

O my brave soul!
O farther farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!

As Whitman is billowed through the shows of earth's pageantries, taking his fill of them, he is ever seeking the great source and origin. The quest is truly the central urge of his whole being, transfiguring life, making its sorrows glorious, its human defeats a victory, and sealing its joys with the supreme sanction. Embarked on this high emprise, the soul may not rest. It will take its use of the things it encounters, it will gather the love out of men's hearts, but it must not be held by any earthly or merely personal ties: "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of

Me." In its journey to "that which is endless as it was beginningless," it must merge all "in the start of superior journeys."

You but arrive at the city to which you were destin'd,
you hardly settle yourself to satisfaction before
you are call'd by an irresistible call to depart,
You shall be treated to the ironical smiles and mockings
of those who remain behind you,
What beckonings of love you receive you shall only
answer with passionate kisses of parting,
You shall not allow the hold of those who spread their
reach'd hands toward you.

Onward, forever onward, the soul passes. In the fulfillment of its mission it comes to "know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls."

Whitman does not falter on the quest. He is eager to seek and patient to endure. He follows the open road, through darkness into light, meeting suffering and pain, yet singing always a glad, exulting, culminating song of joy. He does not withhold himself from any experience, however counter or remote, for seeing life under the

aspect of eternity, he transmutes all things into good. One ideal is his guide, one sovereign purpose sustains him. And his faith is not betrayed. His high daring and devoted singleness of effort receive their triumphant reward. As one who has come through great tribulation, he is counted worthy. Whitman is vouchsafed the beatific vision. His is the blessedness of the pure in heart, for it is granted him to see God. In rapture of the vision he cries, —

O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
Thou moral, spiritual fountain — affection's source — thou reservoir,
. . . . . .
Thou pulse — thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,
That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,
Athwart the shapeless vastnesses of space.

So the radiance of God's presence, "light rare, untellable, lighting the very light,"

floods the soul. After years of search and longing, in the crowded ways of men, in spaces of open fields, in the baffling solitude of the sea, Whitman receives illumination. He is filled with the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth. With a certainty beyond logic and proof, he knows that the spirit of God is the brother of his own. Veritably, Whitman is possessed of God. The vision is indeed the crown of his endeavor, but he does not here resign the quest. God's instant presence lights his way, but the soul has yet a consummation to achieve. Surges of the "sea of torment, doubt, despair and unbelief" toss and constrain him; "wrapt in these little potencies of progress, politics, culture, wealth, inventions, civilization," he loses recognition of the silent, ever-swaying power of the vital universal force that quickens all life toward its goal. The struggle is never to be remitted; but through it he presses on to the ultimate

fulfillment, when the soul shall be forever and perfectly one in God.

Reckoning ahead O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd,
The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,
As fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

Whitman's inmost experience is not to be told in words. Only the soul may know God, and the soul has no vocabulary. Whitman's religious experience is so intimate and personal that he has himself succeeded in communicating it in his poetry only by such symbols as his imagination could wrest from the current language of men. One fact, however, defines itself as salient, namely, that the sum and essence of Whitman's life is religion. In a wholly practical, no less than mystical, sense, his supreme concern is the soul's relation to God. As he conceives and lives it, religion is not a part of

man's experience, though indeed the highest part. It is the entirety of existence, giving their import to all the varied forms of man's activity, and making "the whole coincide."

> It, magnificent, beyond materials, with continuous hands
> sweeps and provides for all.

This conception of the scope and significance of religion determines Whitman's attitude toward the world. Certain beyond peradventure of the essential spirituality of all things, and sustained by his conviction of the profound religiousness of every act, he sees that the struggle of contending forces in which man finds himself enmeshed is but the necessary condition of the soul's progress to its goal, its union with the divine. He welcomes every experience that can befall him, for through it God is working out His purpose for the soul. To interpret the world in the light of the illumination vouchsafed to him is the motive of his poetry.

Know you, solely to drop in the earth the germs of a
greater religion,
The following chants each for its kind I sing.

Whitman thus expressly declares himself a prophet. His vision of ultimate truths is authentic; his immediate experience of God, ecstatic and transcendent, is yet a vital reality. It is a proud title, however, that he arrogates to himself, that of a prophet of a "greater religion." Its justification is to be sought in Whitman's relation to the general religious experience of the race. Its value may perhaps be suggested by a consideration of its practical consequences for men's life to-day, as they too are engaged in a like adventure.

In point of intellectual content, Whitman's faith has elements in common with historic religions. Although he is to be regarded in some sense as a new voice, as another messiah, among many, to whom God has given a special revelation of Himself, yet

he gladly acknowledges his debt to the older faiths and to the prophets of all times. His mission, as he takes it, is "following many and follow'd by many," to "inaugurate a religion"; and he sings "a worship new." Yet Whitman has the historic sense, and he recognizes that the religious consciousness of man is a development. In his representative character, he identifies himself imaginatively with worshipers of every degree in the evolution of the race. With the savage, he makes a fetich of the first rock or stump; "to Shastas and Vedas admirant," he helps the eastern lama or brahmin as he trims the lamps of the idols; he waits responses from oracles, and as a Greek, he dances through the streets in a phallic procession; he does not ignore the Koran. He accepts the Gospels, "accepting Him that was crucified, knowing assuredly that He is divine." He is in turn Catholic, Puritan, Quaker, Methodist. Interpreted, this symbolism means that the modern man, as whose representative finally

Whitman speaks, is a growth out of the past. In all times and in all lands, God has granted a revelation of Himself to men, according to the measure of their capacity to receive it. His revelation is not limited but universal; it is not static and final, but progressive. Each new experience of God vouchsafed to the individual becomes a further manifestation of His unfolding purpose, a new epiphany to the race.

So Whitman, in his own person, as one who has walked with God, taking up the message as his forerunners have delivered it, comes "magnifying and applying." In man's earlier conceptions, God is objectified in the things of Nature, in the sun, in fire and wind and rain, in rivers, trees, and stones. At length He is personified. Man makes God in his own image, endowing Him with human will and emotions. But Whitman takes a step in advance. He names, each with his name, the Gods of old, Jehovah, Zeus, Osiris, Brahma, Odin, Allah, —

Taking them all for what they are worth and not a cent more,
Admitting they were alive and did the work of their days,
Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself.

The elder beliefs, which thus personify God, represent but a stage in the evolution of the religious consciousness. There is a measure of truth and of reality in them; they were the best and the furthest that men could conceive in their time. But such conceptions necessarily limit what is now known to be illimitable. A personified God is by that very fact only finite; whereas the mind demands and the heart craves the infinite. Whitman has had this fuller revelation. Because of his own immediate knowledge of God, he is able to fill out these rough deific sketches better in himself. Out of his own experience he transcends the limitations of formal systems. He is great enough in himself to guess, if he cannot fully comprehend, the inconceivable and ineffable greatness of

God. So he goes beyond the mere anthropomorphic conception of the Deity, for God is too vast to be contained in a formula or a person. Yet none the less the relation between man and God is a personal relation. The springs of life are not a blind, inscrutable force or energy, inherent in matter, and operating inexorably according to its own self-constituted laws. The universe is not a huge machine, set going nobody knows quite how or why, but now running itself, —a monster engine whose methods of operation man may observe and describe, though quite without feeling toward it. On the contrary, the mystery, the wonder, and the beauty of its processes rouse a response in the soul of man. He beholds them with awe, with adoration and worship and love. It is a *living* power, and man enters into communion with it. God is a spirit. The soul is drawn to God by its human need of Him, and it finds Him through love. He possesses utterly the heart, and man's life is to

do His will in joy and thankfulness. The relation is natural, not supernatural. God is not throned afar in another world, but reigns immediate and instant in this world. The whole earth is full of His glory. Whitman does not wish to see God any better than this day, for he sees "something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then." There are no bounds to His pervasiveness. If He is higher than the heavens, He is deep in the hearts of men; ranging the immensities beyond space, He breathes in the curling grass. The universe *is* God. And every least particle of it is the expression of His thought and love.

But, it may be objected, is not this generous recognition of the divine principle in everything a loosening of the ties that bind man to his God? Where everything is divine, then by reversing the application of the standard, nothing is divine. In the lack of distinctions and differences, all values become confused. How shall man find God,

as God, if there is nothing that is not God? Is not this diffusion attended by a corresponding relaxation? That depends. If a man's reliance is upon the external world, whether the natural world actually around him or a supernatural world, reproducing in all its essential features the present order only on a higher plane, then such a man is likely to demand an objective God, a distinct and separate entity, to whom he may come in supplication. For him, God is an over-ruling power, who may be moved by the petitions of His servants; for him, God must be concrete and definite. For such a man, the conception that the kingdom of heaven is within him, that God is a spirit in the sense in which Jesus truly meant the words, may indeed tend to undermine the very foundations of his faith. Because the same habit of mind which leads him to demand an external and objective God, and so to mistake the symbol for the reality, will require him to confound God with the

object itself, and so God becomes no God. For such a man, of literal and materialistic bent, Whitman's conception, bridging the chasm between man and God, substituting identity for separateness, and superseding judgment with love, may tend to subvert his sense of moral obligation and responsibility. Whitman's conception of the Deity, however, is not a vague pantheism. He does not teach that the object itself is God, but rather that in and through the object, God is revealed. God does not limit the revelation of Himself to bibles and oracles; He speaks not only by the mouths of prophets. He manifests Himself in every object, He breathes in every living thing, He moves in every thought and act. Rightly understood, this conception, affirming, through the primacy of the soul, the divinity of man and the immanence of God, brings man into more immediate and ever fuller and richer communion with God.

Though Whitman, resting securely in certain fundamental convictions, wishes to "leave all free," yet in one poem he has attempted by comparison and contrast to define in the accepted formulas his own conception of the nature of God. Recognizing that God is finally ineffable, nevertheless he ventures to set forth in human terms what he humanly conceives of the divine principle in the universe. So he traces the "Square Deific." His figure does not pretend to represent God in Himself; it shadows forth only man's image of Him. Whitman employs for his terms the symbols hallowed by the usage of the centuries.

As his mind ranges the circuit of being, the poet sees active in the moral and religious life of man four powers or forces, which may be named abstractly: first, law and judgment; second, love and forgiveness; third, rebellion and the tendency to evil; fourth, reconciliation and the fusion of all in one. These powers he personifies

as Jehovah, Christ, Satan, and the Holy Spirit.

The underlying fact of the universe, inevitable and inexorable, is Law. Man cannot escape himself, nor avert the law of his own being. Unpersuadable, relentless, without mercy or remorse, God decrees compensation and exacts retribution. Jehovah is judge.

But this is only the base of the Square. Intercepting the Law and turning its direction, rises Love. From this side, lo ! the Lord Christ gazes, Consolator most mild, with gentle hand extended, the mightier God. Love diverts Law but continues it, and is necessary to complete the Square. Love does not abrogate the Law, but it redeems man from its tyranny, offering hope and all-enclosing charity. The individual is destined to an early death, but Love abides. The Saviour passes ; salvation is eternal.

At the other extreme of the line of Law,

and opposite to Love, rises Revolt. The individual asserts himself and his own will against the divine will. Here from his side, Satan is "permanent, equal with any, real as any." Where Law is, there must transgression be. There is no good without an evil corresponding. In the finite world of human experience, the principle of evil is a necessity, and must be, so long as finitude endures.

There is yet another principle, however, which completes the whole. Closing the Square, parallel with Law, mastering Evil, and fulfilling Love, is Spirit. This is the Ultimate Reality, the one essence of all things. It includes not only Saviour and Satan, but also God Himself conceived as a person.

Ethereal, pervading all, (for without me what were all? what were God?)
Essence of forms, life of the real identities, permanent, positive, (namely the unseen,)
Life of the great round world, the sun and stars, and of man, I, the general soul.

Thus Whitman reaches the most inclusive idea of God. On the finite plane he recognizes the necessary antinomies of human thinking and human experience. Good and evil are actual in this world; "the difference between sin and goodness is no delusion": there is sin and there is the corresponding need of salvation. Hence Satan and the Saviour, hence rebellion and the ministry of love. There is the unescapable law of compensation and retribution. Hence Jehovah, eternal Lawgiver and Judge. These antinomies of the finite plane Whitman does not attempt to efface or to reconcile, but he recognizes them only to transcend them. All finite contradictions are resolved in the universal Consciousness, which is at once the Thinker and the thought; the limitations of a personified God are gathered up and lost in the general Soul.

With Whitman, God is realized as *experience*. He is not a tradition, a doctrine,

or a postulate. He is a presence. For the fullest revelation of God, Whitman turns to his own soul. As he welcomes the partial conceptions of Deity of earlier eras for the measure of truth they have in them, although he is able out of his own experience of reality to transcend them, so he accepts the bibles of humanity in so far as they tally with what he already deeply knows of God. Assuredly they are divine. But they are not the last word. They have all grown out of men, and may still grow out of them: it is not bibles, but men, that give the life. The whole universe itself is an infinite bible, wherein at every instant the living God reveals Himself in characters of light. Whitman does not "object to special revelations," but he considers "a curl of smoke or a hair on the back of my hand just as curious as any revelation." So in respect to the authority of the written word, he "would leap beyond, yet nearer bring." Whitman reaches his truth through

his whole being, — through his deep need of God, through the presentments of the external world, through the response of his spirit to the call and welcome of the universe. He takes his authority finally where any man may have it "cheapest," namely, from his own soul.

Whatever satisfies souls is true;
The soul has that measureless pride which revolts from every lesson but its own.

In a stray manuscript fragment, Whitman notes: —

"The certain evolution of (not ecclesiasticism but) Religion through all stages and happenings is (in my opinion) the inevitable developement of humanity and literature. The summum of it would be, that a man cannot go beyond his own soul, and there is nothing higher than the soul; that it finally settles all things by its own standard — settles questions of authority, calibers of Deity, and all that relates to Deity, just the same — whatever the ostensible standards, settles them by its own standards."

[Facsimile]

Elias Hicks

Notes and Fragments — By Walt Whitman

The certain evolution of (not ecclesiasticism but) Religion through all stages and happening is (in my opinion) the inevitable development of humanity and literature. The summary of it would be, that a man cannot go beyond his own soul, and there is nothing higher than the soul; that it finally settles all things by its own standard — settles questions of authority, criterions of Deity, and all that relates to Deity, just the same — whatever the ostensible standards, settles them by its own standards.

In the result, Whitman's position is not a negation of authority but a higher affirmation.

The immediacy of the soul's relation to God is the centre from which Whitman looks out upon the world. The radiance of the Infinite burns in the discrete forms of the finite. The light of God's countenance illumines the path of men. In this light Whitman endeavors to interpret the facts of experience as they are presented to his scrutiny. His religion determines his philosophy. The name that should be given to his philosophy is not important in his case, even if exact definition were possible. Whitman expressly ordains himself "loos'd of limits and imaginary lines"; he recognizes no bounds. "Who has gone farthest? for I would go farther." Moreover, the accepted labels of the schools do not fit precisely this speculative wayfarer. Whitman was a thinker but not a metaphysician. He was versed in Oriental mys-

ticism, and he was familiar with the results of German speculation, notably the work of Hegel. But he was in no sense a professional student of the history of thought. He got his philosophy where every man finally gets his own, if it counts practically in his life; namely, out of himself. In its philosophic aspect, "Leaves of Grass" is to be regarded rather as a contribution toward a world-view than as a definite metaphysical system; for Whitman does not attempt to formulate a philosophy. He merely puts himself on record, what he thinks and feels, for the most part in rather inconsequent and haphazard fashion. He takes experience as it comes to him, quite simply, and he sets down his reaction. He holds himself passive. He does not go out to seek occasion; it comes to him. As a forest draws the rain by subtle influences in response to its need of nutriment, so Whitman, by force of his very courage in confronting life, by the magnetism of his

compelling sincerity, attracts all experience to himself. His faith is great; and the world-order does not fail him. The need itself is a prayer, and God answers it. In the unfolding vistas he reads the revelation.

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,
Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty,
Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness,
Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon and countless stars above,
Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains, trees,
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention,
Now first it seems my thought begins to span thee.

Consequent upon his receptive attitude follows the seeming chaos of his world of impression, for he takes things as they happen, without selection or effort toward arrangement. But as he is registering each immediate fact or emotion in all fidelity, then experience begins to widen and deepen; gradually it shapes itself more and more into an ordered, purposeful whole. Though

he does not attempt to systematize, his words, ever faithful to the fact they represent, become surcharged with implications. What he sets down is philosophy in process. His fluid thought, embracing the increasingly remote, diverse regions of circumstance and emotion, penetrates appearances. As a noiseless, patient spider, to explore the "vacant vast surrounding," launches forth filament after filament out of itself, so his soul, surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space, ceaselessly musing, venturing, seeks the spheres to connect them, —

Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere O my soul.

Finally thus he achieves the end of the soul's quest, the vision of God.

The realization of the instant presence of God, in Nature and in the spirit of man,

transfigures life. Whitman interprets the universe, the facts of consciousness and the phenomena of the objective world, in terms of spirituality. It is all "soul." Not in the sense, however, that Whitman denies the reality of matter. Few men, indeed, have felt more vividly and powerfully the compulsions of the physical world. "The physical and the sensuous, in themselves or in their immediate continuations," Whitman wrote in 1876, "retain holds upon me which I think are never entirely releas'd; and those holds I have not only not denied, but hardly wish'd to weaken." Actual direct contact with things is fullest nourishment to him, and his delight in it is immense. Philosophically, also, he assigns to matter its just valuation in the universal scheme. Matter is not to be denied or ignored; it is necessary to the cosmic whole and is inseparable from it. Matter and spirit are not contrasted and irreconcilable opposites, but rather they are

mutually complementary. "Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen." In one way or another Whitman affirms again and again that "the soul is not more than the body." Even his unremitted communion with God does not withdraw him from the material, objective world, but impels him the more deeply into it. For with Whitman, God is hardly to be conceived apart from His concrete manifestations. Though a keen thinker, Whitman deals very little in abstractions. Life comes to him as sensation and image; he apprehends the universal as everywhere particularized in the single instance. Experience builds itself up for him as a succession of kaleidoscopic sights and sounds and contacts, which he absorbs with his very body. He luxuriates in them with elemental abandon. The richness and inexhaustible variety of these riotous shows brims the measure of his joy, and he is moved to cry, out of the fullness of the

beauty and power of things: "The earth, that is sufficient!"

But Whitman does not rest just there. Though he thus assigns to matter its entire emphasis, yet he recognizes equally another principle, which gives the whole its meaning. Having looked at the objects of the universe, he finds that there is "no one nor any particle of one but has reference to the soul." Invoking "spirituality, the translatress," he demands of material objects "the spiritual corresponding." He will make the poems of materials, for they are to be the most spiritual poems. The objective world of matter is an undeniable reality. But it is not final; its character is mediate. Its function is to embody the soul, to impart individuality to the universal in its particular manifestations. Whitman's primary assumption in respect to the external world is "the temporary use of materials for identity's sake." The condition of the soul's finite existence in the individual is the body.

O the joy of my soul leaning pois'd on itself, receiving identity through materials and loving them, observing characters and absorbing them,
My soul vibrated back to me from them, from sight, hearing, touch, reason, articulation, comparison, memory, and the like,
The real life of my senses and flesh transcending my senses and flesh.

In Whitman's sense of it, the objects of the material world are more than merely limited and passive symbols. So convinced is he of the actuality of the soul, that mystically he imputes consciousness even to inanimate things.

I swear I think now that every thing without exception has an eternal soul !
The trees have, rooted in the ground ! the weeds of the sea have ! the animals !

He hears the redwood tree murmuring out of its myriad leaves, and this is its chant :—

You untold life of me,
For I know I bear the soul befitting me, I too have consciousness, identity,
And all the rocks and mountains have, and all the earth.

Only so, by virtue of this common element of soul in which all things share, can

he explain the response which his spirit meets in Nature. The air that serves him with breath to speak, the objects that call from diffusion his meanings and give them shape, the light that wraps him and all things in delicate equable showers, the paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadside, he believes they are "latent with unseen existences," they are so dear to him. Practically he feels his kinship with the engaging forms of the outer world. Reflection discovers that the link and bond of union is the soul. It is through the soul, also, that man is enabled to apprehend the Infinite. Were it not for this capacity and power, the sheer conception of God would overwhelm the finitude of man.

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee O soul, thou actual Me,
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.

In Whitman's cosmos, therefore, the essential reality is spirit, or, as he more often names it, the soul. It is not a metaphysical abstraction, but a present and immediate actuality. Just this familiar commonplace world of everyday experience is its manifestation.

> Was somebody asking to see the soul?
> See, your own shape and countenance, persons, substances, beasts, the trees, the running rivers, the rocks and sands.

Philosophically regarded, the soul is the absolute within the relative, and comprehends it. It links the individual with the universal. In its separate manifestations, —in the being of man, in the life of mountains, rivers, trees, of continents and seas, of skies and stars, — it still remains of one essence. Its various activities through discrete forms are figured forth as *eidolons*. This conception serves as "light for all and entrance-song for all." It unites the segments to the circle, and gathers up every

single unit of each life into a whole. Out of the hues and objects of the world rise eidolons. The visible is but their womb of birth. Materials, ever-changing, crumbling, recohering, body them forth. The outward forms of wealth and strength and beauty express them. The eidolon is the ideal, at once the animating spirit of the artist's mood, the scholar's studies, the toils of martyr and of hero, and also the end which their efforts seek to accomplish. It is the soul's mate, the real I myself, which gives purport to the body. It is the permanent life of life, the entity of entities. By "eidolon," therefore, Whitman seems to mean what Plato meant by "Idea." It is the archetypal pattern, spiritual in essence, and eternal, to which material in its momentary and shifting moulds endeavors to conform. Yet with this difference from Plato, that whereas the Platonic Idea is static eternally, Whitman's eidolon is dynamic and progressive.

Ever the dim beginning,
Ever the growth, the rounding of the circle,
Ever the summit and the merge at last, (to surely start again,)
Eidólons! eidólons!

From the old, old urge, —

Based on the ancient pinnacles, lo, newer, higher pinnacles,
From science and the modern still impell'd.

Unfixed yet fixed, they sweep the present to the infinite future. The prophet and the bard, in higher stages yet, shall still mediate to the modern, shall still interpret, God and eidolons.

This conception of eidolons is far-reaching in its application. In common with idealism of all ages, it postulates spirit as the universal principle. But, further, Whitman brings his speculation into harmony with the most advanced thought of his time, in that it allies itself with the doctrine of evolution. It allows for progress in the continuous self-realization of God through the world. By this conception,

also, Whitman resolves the paradox of the finite division of the infinite, of separate identity within the universal. He is aware of eternity, but he does not deny the moment. The individual is at once bounded and boundless, limited by identity but limitless in possibilities. Man rises out of an infinite past into the finite being and moment of the present, and straightway he looks toward an infinite future,—the dim beginning and the merge at last, "to surely start again." Because of the fluid character of eidolons, there is no essential conflict. One individuality does not countervail another, for "there can be any number of supremes." Though capable of endless modifications and progressive manifestations, the soul remains constant in essence. The shifting forms of the objective world are one with the divine, eternal Being. Matter and Spirit, Nature and Man, are "disjoin'd and diffused no more," but are gathered up in the all-fusing One.

In this interpretation of the data of experience, it is easy to postulate the cosmic unity. Distinctions and the innumerable diverse problems of finite human existence are resolved in the "idea of the All." The world needs, says Whitman, "a class of bards who will, now and ever, so link and tally the rational physical being of man with the ensembles of time and space, and with this vast and multiform show, Nature, surrounding him, ever tantalizing him, equally a part, and yet not a part of him, as to essentially harmonize, satisfy, and put at rest." Unity is the goal of man's search. The artist labors for unity in each single composition. The scientist observes, describes, analyzes, and formulates, in the hope of penetrating to the one Law of Laws. The thinker strives to reconcile opposites and to embrace all things in a unity of thought. The religious consciousness finds the solution of its problems and the satisfaction of its longings in the soul's union with God.

When the full-grown poet came,
Out spake pleased Nature, (the round impassive globe, with all its shows of day and night,) saying, *He is mine;*
But out spake too the Soul of man, proud, jealous and unreconciled, *Nay, he is mine alone;*
— Then the full-grown poet stood between the two, and took each by the hand;
And to-day and ever so stands, as blender, uniter, tightly holding hands,
Which he will never release until he reconciles the two,
And wholly and joyously blends them.

This is the philosophic task which Whitman, consciously as a poet, undertakes. In practice, he harmonizes life by bringing all the facts of experience into relation with his own identity. He absorbs all objects, all existences, as they play across his temperament. Of them, one and all, he weaves the song of himself. "I see in myself and them the same old law." He takes the world both as many and as one. Life is made up of parts; "time, always without break, indicates itself in parts." But the single fact is linked with the universal whole, and the present

instant pulses forward into eternity. The secret of Whitman's reconciling interpretation is that he accepts the parts *as parts*, not as isolated, independent fragments; and always with implied reference to the whole. "The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall flow and unite — they unite now." The idea of the All, which links the parts in a universal common relationship, gives them meaning. Whitman apprehends the enclosing circle; and any point within it, any phenomenon, is defined and interpreted by reference to the circumference. So he is able to keep his bearings, as he steers his course through the drifting shows of experience. His purpose is

To compact you, ye parted, diverse lives,
To put rapport the mountains and rocks and streams,
And the winds of the north, and the forests of oak and
pine,
With you O soul.

The common element in all material — spirituality — brings infinity within reach of his

hand. He does not doubt that "the majesty and beauty of the world are latent in any iota of the world." The whole cosmos is embraced and revealed, by implication, in any fraction of space or divided moment of time. Hence his supreme reliance on the universe as it is. He is master of continents and seas, he is lord of the day and of all days. He declares himself "an acme of things accomplished and an encloser of things to be." He stands at the centre of all space and all time. Here and now to the soul the world yields up its meaning.

In this cosmic unity Whitman necessarily recognizes the operation of law. One vital principle or energy works through the universe, manifesting itself in infinitely diverse ways. To discover these workings and to describe their ways is the task of science. In so far as science reveals more of order and of wonder in the world, Whitman eagerly accepts its conclusions. He gladly acknowledges the service to human living

accomplished by the efforts of investigators in every field of inquiry. He salutes the lexicographer and grammarian, the chemist, the pioneer voyagers, the geologist, the biologist, and the mathematician, as co-workers with him in the great quest. But the poet does not rest in the facts of the scientist. They are not his dwelling; but by them he enters an area of his dwelling. For his words are less the reminders of properties told than the reminders of life untold. Positive science and exact demonstration, these are the starting-point whence he launches into the mysteries. "There is," he says, "a phase of the real, lurking behind the real, which it is all for." Joyfully accepting modern science and loyally following it without the slightest hesitation, he conceives "still a higher flight, the eternal soul of man, (of all else too,) the spiritual, the religious." Faith has been "scared away by science," but now faith is by the coöperation of science to be restored. Mystical as is Whitman's religious experi-

ence, therefore, he still keeps close to the facts of earth. Conceding everything to science that it demands for itself, he yet out of fullest knowledge declares that "the supreme and final science is the science of God."

The recognition of law in the universe does not lessen the wonder of life but rather enhances it. Whitman sees the world, in its simplest, most familiar processes no less than in its far-flung governance of the stars, as a never-ending miracle.

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,

Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining
so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon
in spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.

It is wonderful to depart, wonderful to be here, it is wonderful to breathe, to see, it is wonderful to *be*. Each new day is a new wonder, each experience is a larger revelation. In his fresh reception of life, amazed and delighted, Whitman has the heart of a child. At the same time he realizes, to the fullest capacity of a mature mind, how deep is the mystery, how great God is. Whitman does not solve the mystery; instead, he propounds mystery. His very sense of the greatness of what is still beyond is a mark of his own greatness. The wonder is revealed to him, not because he has thought so little, but because he has felt so much. This insight into the mysteriousness of

common things, this sense of the wonderfulness of being, sanctifies the whole of life, and issues in worship and joy.

The practical consequence of Whitman's interpretation of life is an immense and unshakable optimism. Superficially it may seem that the basis of his joy of the world is purely physical. In exceptional measure he is constituted harmoniously. With senses extraordinarily keen and perfectly attuned, so great is his abounding health and his delight in it, that he is moved to exclaim, "All comes by the body, only health puts you rapport with the universe." This is true as far as it goes. But Whitman takes a step beyond, when he says, "The earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be complete." To interpret life fully and aright taxes the powers of the whole man. In the end, Whitman's assurance of the ultimate worth of things is not a facile optimism nor cheaply bought. He

had felt "the abrupt curious questionings" stir within him; and he had his dark hours when he "ebb'd with the ocean of life." He would not have compassed the circuit of human experience, if he had not sounded these depths. But his faith rises triumphant. The sure knowledge of God disclosed to his vision furnishes him the interpreting and reconciling principle.

Give me O God to sing that thought,
Give me, give him or her I love this quenchless faith,
In Thy ensemble, whatever else withheld withhold not from us,
Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,
Health, peace, salvation universal.

God is "enclosed in Time and Space"; the Infinite manifests itself in and through all finite forms. The parts are but parts. Taken all together, the universe is God. Every part, therefore, whatever value man may attach to it, whether good or evil as man conceives it, is equally the expression of the divine substance. In this faith, as see-

ing all things from the point of view of the Universal, Whitman is able to say, "There is no imperfection in the present and can be none in the future." His doctrine of present perfection means this, that everything is as it ought to be, when taken on its own terms and tried by its own standards. He does not "call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else." Everything is perfect in the measure that it is what it is in the total scheme, and so fulfills its appointed destiny. That which fills its period and place is equal to any, and "a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars." In this sense, therefore, "what is called good is perfect, and what is called bad is just as perfect." At the same time, Whitman quite recognizes the apparent dualism of the world, — the contrasts, matter and spirit, object and subject, evil and good; but he knows that finally these opposites are not irreconcilable. He does not seek to escape evil by denying its ob-

jective real existence and by attempting to merge the finite self, through negation, into an Absolute Being which is emptied of all content. He does not affirm that evil is a form of good. Whitman boldly grips evil just as it is, as a reality; and in recognizing it as evil, he so transcends it. With clear vision he discerns differences; but he apprehends a unity deeper than all difference. Evil is actual, but it is finite and partial. "Only the good is universal."

If Whitman's theoretical optimism seems at times somewhat too resolute to be wholly convincing, yet in practice he does not ignore the evils of life or seek to equivocate them. In the spirit of a messiah, he takes upon himself all the sufferings and sins of men. There is no meanness, no shame, no agony, that may not be imputed to him. He accepts all. In this matter Whitman is no abstract philosopher. He does not reason about evil until it becomes a figment and phantom, or a mere term in a

syllogism. Evil is a bitter reality. Whitman knows what it is to suffer, both in his own experience and in the sufferings of others. His practical sympathy is boundless. Patient, tender, compassionate, he looks out upon all the sorrows of the world. He sees, hears, and is silent. Though he knows that sin is sin, — it is not to be obscured, or theorized away, — yet he does not judge. As the transcendent Man of Sorrows said to her who was brought before him for judgment, "Neither do I condemn thee"; so Whitman says to the fallen one, "Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you." He loves. And loving, he pities, "like the light falling around a helpless thing." This attitude of acceptance is one with the divine principle, which allows for evil, in awaiting the evolution of the good. In process, the good can realize itself only by overcoming evil. Opposition is the necessary condition of growth.

Growth, therefore, is the explanation of the finite. Things are complete in themselves, yet lead onward. "Do you suppose I could be content with all if I thought them their own finale?" In his survey of the cosmic scheme, Whitman postulates perfection and allows for progress.

> In this broad earth of ours,
> Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,
> Enclosed and safe within its central heart,
> Nestles the seed perfection.

In the whole range of finite things, there is no part but contains within itself the germ of its perfection, — "by every life a share or more or less"; and it awaits development. But as is evident in the physical world, so also in the moral life and in the spiritual realm, development can come only through opposition and struggle. Hence "it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle neces-

sary." Whitman rests his case on the universality of the germ of good. He does not ignore the portentous fact of evil, or seek to minimize its actuality ; but he is able to justify it. Victory is the outcome of contending forces. Virtue is won through opposition. He perceives, therefore, that evil may be, indeed must be, transmuted into good. Roaming in thought over the universe, he sees the little that is Good steadily hastening toward immortality, and the vast all that is called Evil hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead. The purport and end of the whole cosmic scheme, as Whitman interprets it, is spiritual growth. The central reality, primal and ultimate, of the universe is the soul. For it, the partial flows to the permanent; for it, the real to the ideal tends. The soul is the meaning of the "mystic evolution." This is the "guiding thread so fine along the mighty labyrinth." In the light of future but certain attainment, Whitman triumphs over

the sufferings of the present time, which are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. We are saved by hope. "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

Secure in the assurance that there is a purpose in the world and that this purpose makes for good, Whitman is able to confront calmly and victoriously the ultimate problem of life, — the meaning of death. Manifestly, the perfection that he conceives as the purport of the universe, the goal of all endeavor, and the justification of strife and evil, is not to be achieved in the one brief span of years upon the earth. Without the "exquisite transition of death" and the promise of immortality, what we call life would be vain indeed. Development, Continuity, Immortality, Transformation, — this is Whitman's formula. Life is not static but progressive. It is not to be explained from within on its own plane. Its

secret is unlocked only by a key which is beyond life. "All I see and know, I believe to have its main purport in what will yet be supplied." For Whitman, this key is death and "entrance to its sovereign, dim, illimitable grounds." In this transition there is no breach. Death is not cessation but a change; it is not the end, but only a new beginning. Toward this unfolding and release all life tends.

I have dream'd that the purpose and essence of the known life, the transient,
Is to form and decide identity for the unknown life, the permanent.

Whitman does not attempt to prove immortality. He asserts it. His conviction of its certainty is intuitive, but vivid to the point that leaves no room for question. Immortality is the presupposition of his entire experience of life, and its interpretation. This conception determines his way of thinking, and "from the first, and so on throughout, more or less lurks in my

writings, underneath every page, every line, everywhere." Immortality resolves all problems of the finite plane. The world has no meaning on any other terms. So certain is he of its necessity that he exclaims, —

I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous
float is for it, and the cohering is for it!
And all preparation is for it — and identity is for it —
and life and materials are altogether for it!

Whitman's certitude of the beneficence of death's ministry is not a philosophic postulate; it is more than a faith. It is a reality. As a boy, the vision had come to him in the symbol of the mocking-bird bereft of his mate. He sees love balked by loss. He questions the night and the stars. Then on the island shore, in the flicker of the sagging yellow moon, the rustle of the sea, blending with the wail of the bird, whispers the low and delicious word, death.

Which I do not forget,
But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's
gray beach,
With the thousand responsive songs at random,
My own songs awaked from that hour,
And with them the key, the word up from the
waves,
The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my
feet,
(Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in
sweet garments, bending aside,)
The sea whisper'd me.

In the war-hospitals, month upon weary month, Whitman hourly bowed before the "dark mother always gliding near with soft feet." In the generous years that remained to him following the War, he himself dwelt in the Valley of the Shadow. But his thought mounted thence to the supreme heights of vision and poetic utterance, meditating the mighty themes of God and immortality. Throughout his work, his finest passages are those inspired by his religious passion and those in which he chants

the praise of death. Here truth and beauty blend in a pæan of exaltation, and from the summit he calls, —

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love — but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come,
come unfalteringly.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously
sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments
and feastings for thee,

And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies wide,
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.

In the result, Whitman approximates the essential teaching of Jesus. More than any other prophet, seer, and genius in the history of the race, Jesus had the secret of God. The fullness and immediacy of his revelation marks his primacy and absolute uniqueness among the sons of men. I hold Whitman to be a later and lesser manifestation of the spirit that was in him.

Whitman, too, was granted the beatific vision. In the light and the strength of this revelation he felt himself free of formulas and creeds. He walked with God. Announcing the message so intrusted to him, he ventured to regard himself as a chosen prophet, recognizing, however, that he in his turn was not final, but that others are yet to come to announce anew the glad tidings. Inevitably, he was conscious of his spiritual kinship with the Master. "My spirit to yours, dear brother," he exclaims,

Do not mind because many sounding your name do not
understand you,
I do not sound your name, but I understand you,
I specify you with joy O my comrade to salute you,
and to salute those who are with you, before and
since, and those to come also,
That we all labor together transmitting the same charge
and succession,
We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of
all theologies,
Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,
. . . . . .

We walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,
Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are.

It is not in his own person that Whitman speaks thus, but as the simple vehicle of the spirit of God. The equality ascribed is not to be imputed to the individual. The greatness of the revelation, taking possession of his soul, makes all its prophets equal. Its fullest expression is achieved in the matchless beauty and purity of Jesus. It is enough that a ray of this glory fell upon a later seer and its radiance transfigured life for him.

The great fact about Walt Whitman, gathering up all the incredibly varied elements of his tremendous personality into one inclusive unity of purpose and expression, and making "the whole coincide," is this, — that he was given to the world to bring to men a revelation of God. What

Jesus expressed in completeness for all time, Whitman reaffirms in his own phrases and for a new generation. The central reality of his experience is the immediate presence of God. From this follows the controlling motive of his life,—to interpret God to the men and women of his own day, in terms of America and democracy of the nineteenth century. Necessarily, there is much in his teaching that is partial and local. But this necessary emphasis upon conditions that are finite and merely temporary need not deflect or obscure the essentials of his experience and doctrine that are of universal validity and application. Courageously he embarks upon the soul's adventure, unfalteringly he pursues the quest, triumphantly he brings it to its issue. It is granted him to see God. Realizing the oneness of his spirit with God's spirit, in joy and thankfulness he becomes an instrument of God's manifestation of Himself to men. He renounces all private inter-

ests, he surrenders his individual will to the universal will, and in his special way, according to his capacity and powers, he devotes his life to the cause. He secures for himself the freedom from all private ties, — divesting himself of the holds that would hold him, — which makes it possible for him to go out to all men equally in compassion and sustaining love. "They said unto him, 'Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.' And he answered them, saying, 'Who is my mother or my brethren?' And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, 'Behold my mother and my brethren!'" So there is no one to whom Whitman denies his practical sympathy and loving helpfulness. Love is the secret. Love of God in the heart, possessing the will and the life, and love of all creatures, expressed in service. And Whitman has the secret.

Religion and life are one. This is what

the soul's adventure means to Whitman, —absolute, joyous, and unquestioning devotion of one's self to the cause, the merging of all private interests in universal ends, a triumphant, sustaining faith in God, and immediate and unremitted communion with Him. A battered, wrecked, old man, he sends up a song of consecration and of praise to God.

All my emprises have been fill'd with Thee,
My speculations, plans, begun and carried on in thoughts of Thee,
Sailing the deep or journeying the land for Thee;
Intentions, purports, aspirations mine, leaving results to Thee.

Results are indeed with God. It is not for the individual himself to assess the value of his achievement. He does not know. But the supreme test of the worth of life to him as it has been apportioned him, is that at the end he can thank God for it.

One effort more, my altar this bleak sand;
That Thou O God my life hast lighted,
With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,

THE SOUL'S ADVENTURE

Light rare untellable, lighting the very light,
Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages;
For that O God, be it my latest word, here on my knees,
Old, poor, and paralyzed, I thank Thee.

V

TO YOU

I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a casual look upon you and then averts his face,
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main things from you.

THE open road to which Whitman beckons has brought us along devious ways. Through evil and through good, in victory balanced by defeat, we have attended the great companion with mingled faith and questionings. Obscured by distorting shadows, he has seemed to elude us, only to emerge again into strange and splendid light. But this towering gray figure, with the scars of the years upon him, radiant with assured majesty, inspires confidence; and we have trusted him, though we are not sure we quite understand him.

Manifestly, there is no single formula

for Whitman. As the measureless tangled undergrowth has parted to reveal the heights of vision and achievement, so Whitman's own nature is compounded of violent contrasts. At moments he is grossly physical in his assertion of the natural man; but it is equally evident that the essential fibre of his being is spiritual. "Muscle and pluck forever!" he cries; but the same stanza ends with the line, "Nothing endures but personal qualities." He believes in "the flesh and the appetites"; and yet the central reality of the whole universe for him is the soul. His arrogance among all assaults upon his personality is perfectly matched by his humility of spirit in the presence of God's manifestations of His mysterious way. Absolutely unconstrained and inconsiderate in his irresistible onward movement through experience, he is mastered by a tenderness that passes the love of woman. His acute consciousness of himself and of his original relation

to things betrays him into a pose; but to know Whitman at all is to be convinced of his entire singleness of purpose and his immense sincerity. In this counterplay of contradictory forces, one fact is unmistakable. For better or worse, Whitman is a tremendous, incalculable power. Impinging on the character of his reader with a persuasive pressure that is not to be gainsaid, he leaves no one passive or indifferent. It is impossible to confront this titanic energy without submitting, for the moment at least, to its positiveness and inherent authority. The reader may wrest himself free, to be the more confirmed in his own manner of life. It cannot be helped. Whitman is content merely to affirm himself, just as he is, without embellishment or disguise. It is enough for him to live his life as it is apportioned him, to follow where the way leads. Lest there be any misunderstanding in the matter, if you are the new person drawn to him, he gives

you fair warning, before you attempt him further, that he is not what you supposed, but far different. Defining thus the probable terms of his companionship, he offers himself freely. But the choice remains open. The issue of the encounter he commits imperatively and unreservedly to you.

For himself, Whitman asks only to be tested by experience. His appeal is to life direct. That vivid immediacy which characterizes his own contact with the world he communicates in his poetry now across all distance instantly to you. A big, concrete, living personality flashes from out the printed page. Whitman is not professionally a poet.

No dainty dolce affettuoso I,
Bearded, sun-burnt, gray-neck'd, forbidding, I have arrived,
To be wrestled with as I pass for the solid prizes of the universe,
For such I afford whoever can persevere to win them.

This is not the voice of some idle singer of an empty day. Here speaks a man in

the flesh. And what he offers is no mere æsthetic enjoyment: it is nothing less than the stern, rough, but rapturous actualities of life at first hand. Necessarily he must use some medium of communication; but in his poetry he will have nothing hang in the way like a curtain between himself and you, — "not even the richest curtains." He asks that his performance be tried by Nature and the elementary laws.

If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore,
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key,
The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words.

He intends that his poems shall be "a book separate, not link'd with the rest nor felt by the intellect."

No shutter'd room or school can commune with me,
But roughs and little children better than they.

He promises that if we will stop with him this day and night, we shall possess the origin of all poems; and this, we come to

see, is not to master the accomplishment of verse, but to be "faithful to things." There is no hint here of art for art's sake.

> Have you reckon'd that the landscape took substance and form that it might be painted in a picture?
> Or men and women that they might be written of, and songs sung?

A morning-glory at his window satisfies him more than the metaphysics of books; and "the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue." Life is immeasurably rich in and of itself,—beyond the reach of words. The press of his foot to the earth springs a hundred affections, which scorn the best he can do to relate them. The words of his book he conceives to be nothing, but "the drift of it everything"; he means that untold latencies shall thrill to every page. When he does achieve expression, his words communicate the very sensation of the thing itself. He catches the rhythm of the unquiet sea, and he emulates the melodious character of the earth; his

verses breathe the tonic fragrance of ocean, and touch us as with the caress of the sunset breeze. "Leaves of Grass" is an excursion into life: it takes us on a morning ramble through woods and fields, animate with myriad presences and vocal with all natural sounds; it is an afternoon saunter down Broadway with and against the great human tides, or a glimpse at many diverse activities and occupations; it is a lonely venture into the night, in communion of spirit with the eloquent silence of the stars. To you, whoever you are, this is Whitman's message,—life, "immense in passion, pulse, and power," but life immediately and always at first hand.

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

So Whitman defines himself less as a poet or as a teacher than as an influence. At first he imposes by sheer scale. The in-

tense positiveness of his personality and the magnitude of his compass coerce and overwhelm. But unaccountably, we are drawn to him as well. More potent than his assertiveness, more inclusive than the range of his thought, is his love. Once we yield to him at all, we cannot escape the flood of sympathy with which he would envelop us. He wins our assent, not by his authority, but by the nobility and beauty of the ideal he embodies. He works by contagion. The ideals which he represents, which use his personality as their instrument of expression, the ideals of love, of sympathy, of the culture of the self in order to a larger self-devotion and fuller service in the cause, these ideals are communicated to us to modify the very fibre of our character. If we read Whitman aright, it is not to become his disciples; it is in ourselves *to be* love and service. The external details of his experience were special to him as an individual. The outcome

of that experience is capable of general application. Whitman's results are true for him. They become true for the reader in so far as he makes trial of them and finds them to be the expression also of his own nature. It is Whitman's attitude rather than his acts, it is his method rather than his conclusions, that finally counts. For the moment, however, it may help toward a tentative estimate of Whitman's significance, to formulate his teaching with reference to its general application, remembering that when all is said, he expects "the main things from you."

The cardinal point of Whitman's doctrine is the importance of the individual. About this theme his thought plays from beginning to end with uncompromising insistence; but at the same time his conception of it undergoes an evolution. It amplifies in ever enlarging, more inclusive circles. In the expanding compass of his thought, the individual retains always his individuality,

but the particular becomes merged in the universal. As becomes evident before we reach the end of Whitman, he really means the soul. But at the instant, he sees the particular with such intense distinctness that his expression imputes to it an exclusive character that it does not possess in his total conception of it. Here, as elsewhere in Whitman, the part, to be rightly understood, must be referred to the whole.

Whitman starts with the external and the physical. He celebrates the well-begotten, well-born, well-framed man and woman. He admires the healthy and the normal, the man or woman who is strong, firm-fibred in body, and sane of mind. He glorifies the power that comes with abundance rather than from singularity. It is the average man, not the exceptional, who has in him the makings of a hero. Moreover, in his doctrine Whitman does not distinguish between the man and the woman. Not only are they absolutely equal in capacity and opportun-

ity, but he sees no difference in them. What is true for one is just as true, and that in all respects, for the other. Invariably when he invokes the man, he invokes the woman too. "I say to any man or woman"; "The man and woman I love"; "I launch all men and women forward," — the phrase is continually on his lips.

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.

Similarly he makes no distinction in station or condition. Whether the President at his levee or Cudge that hoes in the sugar-field, whether successful or defeated as this world goes, whether prophet or felon, —

Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless — each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here.

It matters not who or what you are, you have your chance, — you as an individual.

"O soul, we have positively appear'd — that is enough."

With the desire to set forth a complete human personality in all its activities and meanings, Whitman is led to include within his total scheme a series of poems celebrating sex. To him, fatherhood is no less beautiful and divine than maternity. It is not necessary to discuss here the question of his wisdom or unwisdom. In many passages in his prose writings — notably in "A Memorandum at a Venture," and in his account given in "Specimen Days" of a conversation with Emerson — he has explained his purpose; and he has found able and brilliant champions among both men and women. It is conceivable that one may question the absolute success of the result, whether on the score of literary workmanship or on the ground of expediency with regard to conventional morality. His sex poems are not his best work; here the propagandist overcomes the poet. It is impossible, however, not to concede

that Whitman, whether or not successful in the result, was justified in his attempt by reference to his total purpose to present a personality in its entirety. By way of a single word it may be said that these much-disputed poems mean simply what they happen to mean to the individual reader. If they are an offense, they are an offense. Yet much of Whitman still remains. On the other hand, they are right to those who see them so. A side-light on this controverted topic comes from a writer who was the extreme opposite of Whitman in his attitude toward the proprieties. Quite without reference to "Leaves of Grass," Ruskin says in "Modern Painters":—

"We may dismiss this matter of vulgarity in plain and few words, at least as far as regards art. There is never vulgarity in a *whole* truth, however commonplace. It may be unimportant or painful. It cannot be vulgar. Vulgarity is only in concealment of truth, or in affectation."

Says the crystal-souled Emerson, from the clear, cold ether-purity of his snow-wrapped summit:—

> All are needed by each one;
> Nothing is fair or good alone.

To Whitman every part is beautiful, because he sees the whole.

I will not make poems with reference to parts,
But I will make poems, songs, thoughts, with reference to ensemble,
And I will not sing with reference to a day, but with reference to all days,
And I will not make a poem nor the least part of a poem but has reference to the soul,
Because having look'd at the objects of the universe, I find there is no one nor any particle of one but has reference to the soul.

To be at all—this is the starting-point. At first it seems to Whitman that all proceeds from "beautiful blood and a beautiful brain." But from the power that comes with physique he passes, by a natural and inevitable transition, to the personal qualities. These are in some measure a gift of Nature, in which

the individual himself has no choice,—a fact which perhaps Whitman does not sufficiently recognize,—but they are also capable of cultivation. Just here, then, begins the suggestive and helpful part of Whitman's teaching. By personal qualities he means self-respect, self-mastery, individual freedom under divine law, and the developed capacity for self-devotion to the service of others in love and sympathy. The qualities he prizes, therefore, can be achieved by any one, independently of external conditions. Whitman exemplifies them in himself; and he communicates them to another by force of natural contagion. Moreover, they are of such a character as to recommend themselves by virtue of their own evident worth and beauty. Their appeal, once they are truly known, is in themselves; and it is compelling. Whitman's function is to reveal their true nature; and he leaves the rest "to you." In assessing values in life, he initiates his own standard. For the con-

ventional goods that the world esteems, he substitutes new worths. He sets no store by the possession of material things. He admires the animals because they are self-contained and are not "demented with the mania of owning things." He makes no account of ownership anyway, "as if one fit to own things could not at pleasure enter upon all, and incorporate them into himself or herself." The real goods of life, the sun and the rain, the air, the beauty of earth, are free, and do not need to be possessed to be enjoyed. "I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the earth." Any man, if only he have the capacity in himself, has access to all the gifts of the universe. The personal qualities, therefore, that Whitman celebrates are not limited to a class, but are eligible to all. He discerns "what vast native thoughts" may look "through smutch'd faces." He strips off the husks of conventional estimates and penetrates to the central manhood of each indi-

vidual. To be human, that is the main thing. He abolishes class distinctions, breaks the pride of caste, wrenches us out of our traditional background, and plants us squarely on our own feet, to stand or fall by what we are in ourselves. He is for "the fibre of things and for inherent men and women."

In order to emphasize the universality of the true goods that life holds, Whitman chooses for his exemplar the "average man." The phrase is not quite exact, but his meaning is clear enough. He will not reckon with the exclusive and the elect, though he does not deny them their chance as well. It is sometimes remarked that by a curious irony the very people that Whitman most glorifies are least able to grasp the significance of his work. The average man, it is said, does not read "Leaves of Grass." For himself, Whitman likes best those who get the real culture from life and not from books, those who do not pretend to read but are

closest to actuality,—farmers, woodsmen, sailors, artisans. Such people, the "roughs and little children," do not understand "Leaves of Grass," perhaps, but they understood Whitman. And they understand him to-day, when once they have passed the barrier of the printed page, when they hear the living spoken word and touch the presence that moves within it. The culture for which Whitman pleads is the culture of the personality, the return from external standards and supports to one's own native force and the authority inherent in one's self. If one have the natural qualities, that is enough. "I do not ask who you are, that is not important to me." The individual becomes a man, not by allowance or good-fortune, but in his own right. He constitutes himself his own centre. Taking his stand upon his necessary rightness in the scheme of things, he comes into harmony with the universal laws, and achieves equilibrium. From him, as a perfectly poised centre, radiate influ-

ences which have the weight of the whole world behind them.

But there may be as many centres as there are individuals. "There can be any number of supremes — one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another, or one life countervails another." Whitman's hero differs from the hero of Carlyle, in that he does not assert himself at the expense of others, but develops in coöperation with them. Carlyle divides mankind rigidly into two classes — the hero and the masses. The hero is the strong and able man, of extraordinary natural gifts and exceptional opportunity. All others are the masses; and they but furnish the background against which the hero advances his preëminence. Whitman, on the contrary, declares that "there is no trade or employment but the young man following it may become a hero." It is all in one's self. Mastership is not relative to the inferiority of others, but is the absolute

development of one's own powers and positive qualities with reference solely to one's own possibilities. In this sense one may be a hero, even though he seem to others to have failed.

Vivas to those who have fail'd!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes!
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known!

Such mastership as Whitman conceives, therefore, is within the reach of every man. It rests with him, independently of all external conditions, to achieve it. Whitman's special doctrine of individuality may be defined more clearly, perhaps, by contrast with the teaching in this regard of two other contemporary Americans — Thoreau and Emerson. Thoreau is concerned with the destiny of *an* individual, namely, Henry David Thoreau. His efforts are directed to the working-out of his own salvation in

seclusion from the world and by asserting himself against the ways of men. His scheme of life may have succeeded perfectly for him. But his truth is true by exception; it is not capable of extension to men in the mass. Universally applied, it contains within itself the elements of its own destruction. Emerson, for his part, discourses upon *the* individual, generically. And one feels, even in his highest flights and when he writes most potently and persuasively, that Emerson is dealing with an abstraction, and not a concrete reality which one can achieve in one's own person. It is not an individual nor the individual, that Whitman has in mind, but *individuals*. He deals not with abstractions but with actualities as they uncompromisingly are. He does not obscure individual limits. One fact, though linked with all other facts, and though capable of development from within, remains indefeasibly itself to all eternity.

Underneath all, individuals,
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores individuals,
The American compact is altogether with individuals,
The only government is that which makes minute of individuals,
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly to one single individual — namely to You.

By the term "individual," Whitman means a very definite reality. He means *you*, whoever and whatever you are. There is no mistaking his intention, or the application of his doctrine.

But Whitman is aware, too, that no man lives to himself alone. The development and self-realization of the individual soul, which he glorifies and toward which his work tends, is not for its own sake only: it is for the sake of the mass as well.

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Although the destiny of man is to fulfill his own personality, yet Whitman considers individuals always in their relation to the

natural world around them, and in their relations to one another in organized society. He sees that the necessary conditions of attaining the mastership which he conceives for each individual are the seemingly conflicting modes of freedom and cooperation. By freedom he understands an independence of all external restraints, and, complementing this, a harmony with one's self and with the universal laws, as the only means whereby the individual can enter into his natural heritage. There must be also, on the other hand, coöperation with one's fellows, and not opposition or subjugation; for the individual reaches his highest self only through love and sympathy. So the problem of society is twofold: at the same time that it provides for organization, it must leave scope to the individual for his freest and fullest development. It cannot be said that the individual is for the sake of society, or that society is for the sake of the individual. The interests

of one are the interests of the other; like the convex and the concave of an arc, they must exist together. The social order which seems best to provide the necessary conditions for the highest development of the individual is a democracy, in that it furnishes him the largest opportunity for expression and growth. And conversely, it is the aggregate of freest and most powerful personalities that makes possible the truest and best democracy.

In the remarkable essay entitled "Democratic Vistas," an essay which will repay reading for its timely pertinence, shrewd insight, and profound suggestiveness, Whitman outlines his programme. Though still in the formative stage, the United States perfectly supplies the conditions for the realization of the democratic ideal. Whitman expressly takes issue with the old-world civilizations for their artificial systems of caste and social exclusiveness. He rests his whole case upon "the theory of

development and perfection by voluntary standards and self-reliance." He has no illusions about the present order of things in America. "Society, in these States, is canker'd, crude, superstitious, and rotten." But he is not without hope, for he sees a remedy, and he trusts the future. America is immense in material resources, in the numbers of its people, and in the sturdy character of the vast average, immense also in its possibilities for expansion. However, Whitman is not content with merely this. And here is the remedy. He pleads for a great moral and religious civilization as the only justification of a great material one. It is not enough that a country possess free political institutions, and material and industrial resources of prodigious extent and incalculable wealth. So much we have already in the United States. "But woe to the age or land in which these things, movements, stopping at themselves, do not tend to ideas." The real purpose of the best

social order is the making of personalism. "The last, best dependence is to be upon humanity itself, and its own inherent, normal, full-grown qualities." To this end everything must be constrained to minister. Democracy must have its own forms of art and literature, for the soul of man needs what is addressed to the soul. "The literature, songs, esthetics, &c., of a country are of importance principally because they furnish the materials and suggestions of personality for the women and men of that country, and enforce them in a thousand effective ways." But greater than all Culture are "the fresh, eternal qualities of Being." So far as a civilization fails to develop these qualities, it fails completely. Material wealth and intellectual acumen are of no avail unless they tend toward the soul. Democracy, if it is inspired by the highest ideal and so is able to triumph over its necessary limitations, makes this development possible. For it seeks not

only to individualize but also to universalize.

"What Christ appear'd for in the moral-spiritual field for human-kind, namely, that in respect to the absolute soul, there is in the possession of such by each single individual, something so transcendent, so incapable of gradations, (like life,) that, to that extent, it places all beings on a common level, utterly regardless of the distinctions of intellect, virtue, station, or any height or lowliness whatever,"

—so democracy as a social order, when thoroughly spiritualized as Whitman pleads for it, recognizing the equality of men and of souls, is worthy of our most earnest efforts toward its realization. Whitman's interest in this matter is more than merely theoretical. The aim which he has so genuinely and profoundly at heart is to be reached by every possible means. If a social order can be so framed as to contribute to this end, then that way our duty lies.

A great city is that which has the greatest men and women,
If it be a few ragged huts it is still the greatest city in the whole world.

In his social and political propaganda, as in the lesson of his life, his purpose is the building of great personalities.

From Whitman's conception of the full import of individuality follows his morality. And it is indeed a morality for heroes. Admitting no standards other than those of his own nature harmonized with universal laws, the individual accepts the fullest consequences of what he chooses to be. There can be no delegated responsibility and no vicarious atonement. The individual is his own Saviour or his own Satan.

Each man to himself and each woman to herself, is the word of the past and present, and the true word of immortality;
No one can acquire for another — not one,
Not one can grow for another — not one.

The song is to the singer, and comes back most to him,
The teaching is to the teacher, and comes back most to him,

The murder is to the murderer, and comes back most
to him,
The theft is to the thief, and comes back most to him,
The love is to the lover, and comes back most to him,
The gift is to the giver, and comes back most to him —
it cannot fail.

Nothing fails of its perfect return. We cannot escape ourselves. Reward and punishment are not meted out by an overruling external power; they inhere in the act itself, and it rests with the individual freely to choose. "We are beautiful or sinful in ourselves only." This law of natural compensation operates inexorably, but it should not determine the motives of conduct. Constructively, Whitman's morality is the morality of health and affirmation. There is in it no element of fear. He believes in the fullest self-expression, not with reference to punishment or reward, but for its own sake. The standard of action is not conformity to an external code, but inner rightness. The individual is to act in freedom. Freedom may be won in its

inception by opposition to the lesser law, but the highest freedom is harmony with the highest law, the universal. It must be confessed that this morality is not for little men. It appeals to the best, not the worst, in man, and it presupposes the loftiest ideal. That it winnows the unfit along the way and leaves them struggling, is not Whitman's fault but theirs. His teaching is meant to be inclusive; and it is universal enough in its scope and application to admit of many interpretations, — like the laws of Nature. But like the laws of Nature, when ignorantly or willfully misunderstood, it carries with it its own retribution. That Whitman's declaration of independence may be perverted to excuse license is no arraignment of its righteousness and justice. It reverts to the individual himself and is the measure of his own morality. The watchwords of Whitman's ethics are Ensemble, Evolution, Freedom, set in the sky of Law.

Throughout, Whitman's ideal of achievement is spiritual manhood. The purport of life and its fruition are of the soul. The material and the physical are redeemed by his conquering spirituality; the human is glorious because it incarnates the divine. Earth takes its meaning as we discern in it

> Forms, objects, growths, humanities, to spiritual images ripening.

To his rapt vision the seen is the prophecy of the unseen. With this faith, glorying in the present goodness of earth and secure in the promise of the future, he confronts all problems. Whitman trusts the soul, and he is willing to await development through æons, for he knows "the amplitude of time." God is: and results are in His hands.

The culminating impression of Whitman's personality is the sense that here is a man who, in spite of his unconventional manner and strange fashion of life, does finally and intimately understand *me*. One

feels that this man knows what life is: he has been all the way round it, he has walked its deep places, he has mounted its heights; somehow, at some point, he has entered into *my* particular experience. His many-sided contact with men and things has been rich and fruitful for himself; but the results are not for himself alone. He has suffered in my sorrows and known my grief. The joy that he had of life,—

> The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,
> The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river,

— these may be *my* joy too, my sustenance and my glories. And in my joy his own finds intensification and its crown.

Whatever our mood, whatever our need, we can turn to Whitman and meet response. His understanding is complete, his sympathy universal. We can do nothing and be nothing, but he will enfold us. He

knows our faults and our weaknesses, and he accepts them. He has the same in himself.

I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dar'd not speak,
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant,
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,
The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting,
Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these wanting.

So he understands with an understanding born of experience; he reaches us with a sympathy born of love. The magnetism which Whitman effused in life still radiates from the personality that is vital in his poems. Out of the past a voice speaks which is as a presence with us at the instant and a secure possession for the future.

When you read these I that was visible am become invisible,
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me,

Fancying how happy you were if I could be with you
and become your comrade;
Be it as if I were with you. (Be not too certain but I
am now with you.)

Yet Walt Whitman is not final.

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the
future,
I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back
in the darkness.

He never loses sight of his merely representative character. Again and again, in a thousand different ways, he brings home the lesson *to you*. He genuinely intends that his poems shall be only a preparation and a beginning.

The words of the true poems give you more than
poems,
They give you to form for yourself poems, religions,
politics, war, peace, behavior, histories, essays,
daily life, and every thing else.

His Leaves of Grass are but roots and leaves alone — "love-buds put before you and within you whoever you are."

If you bring the warmth of the sun to them, they will
open and bring form, color, perfume, to you,
If you become the aliment and the wet, they will be-
come fruits, tall branches and trees.

The significance of Whitman, even as he himself conceives it, is what awakes in the individual reader as the result of contact with this germinal personality. It is his express desire and purpose to carry us beyond himself. "He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher." However deep our gratitude to Whitman for what he may have done for us along life's way, however intense our loyalty to his person and name, we should not mistake the man for his message. It is an error to worship Whitman. We reap the full fruits of his teaching in the measure that we worship what Whitman worshiped and what he was sent into the world to show forth. Life spreads before us, an open road. Walt Whitman is one of the Great Companions along the way. "Allons! whoever

you are, come travel with me!" We may accept his example as suggestive and illuminating. We may acknowledge his sustaining influence. Finally, we must travel the road, each for himself. At the last and best, Whitman is a comrade in the soul's adventure.

As he reaches a genial hand to us in token of comradeship, he beams the assurance, —

> Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me one place search another,
> I stop somewhere waiting for you.

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